

EARTHWARE


BY HENRY RUSSELL





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EARTHWARE



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EARTHWARE

BY

LINDSAY RUSSELL

Author of "The Gates of Kut," "Land o' the Dawning," etc.

*"On Life, the Potter's shelf, there stood
Wave made of earth and clay"*

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EXHIBIT

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To
J. A. MANSON

*Whether I climb Fame's ladder to the stars
Or wake to find its rungs but broken bars. . . .
. . . Let me forget not all those hands that held
The ladder steady in the darkest hours.
Let me forget not in the gladdest day,
Let me remember, even when the bones
Stir in youth's passionate graveyards, that the flowers
Of Friendship grew so whitely by the way,
Their petals made a carpet o'er the stones.*

ETHEL QUINN.

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Part I
THE CLAY



EARTHWARE

CHAPTER I

A SPINNER IN THE SHADOWS

*I broider the world upon a loom,
I broider with dreams my tapestry :
Here in a little lonely room
I am master of earth and sea,
And the planets come to me.*

ARTHUR SYMONS.

As often as the heavy outer door of the lonely croft house banged to that afternoon—partly owing to the wind which already skirled wintrily over Bald Gourie farm, and partly because Michael Hardie was ever a careless man with his doors and windows—the yellow-haired child, playing on the hearthrug of gaily coloured rags, jumped up in sudden terror and, with astonishing celerity, hid her queer toys out of sight.

She stood panting, her eyes wide, and her two thin hands pressed hard against her breast. Her heart pounded loudly. The harsh, uneven, recurring crash of the door drove her always so suddenly out of a world of forbidden wonderful dreams and fancies into a realm of stern reality.

Then the familiar things of the kitchen again resolved themselves in friendly fashion around her—the tall grandfather clock in the corner, the dark oak dresser with its blue delf glimmering from the deepening shadows, the brass hooks shining in the leap of the firelight, the scrubbed yellow table, and, at Eltrym's feet, that gorgeous red and blue and yellow rag rug

which her own small fingers had helped patiently to sew.

True, the spinning-wheel glowered at her morosely from its neglected corner. The firelight played and flashed on it and her fancy endowed it with winking, watching eyes.

"*I don't mind,*" it said to her, "*but when she comes in ye'll catch it, I ken!*"

And Eltrym shivered as she listened for footsteps in the corridor without, sounds all too familiar in their year-long monotony and their indications of their various owners' moods. But no steps, heavy and unimaginative, quick and bustling, slipshod and careless, or—as on special occasions like these—unsure and lurching, echoed on the worm-eaten boards.

The croft house grew silent again and the big white-washed kitchen with its heavy rafters darkened fast. Only the door slammed to at intervals in a fresh jolt of the shoulders of the wind, as it swung angrily round the head of the loch and always unexpectedly encountered that farm-house perched high on the desolate hillside.

The wind thundered at the door, rattled the windows, and trumpeted forth its opinion of Bald Gourie's grim resistance. In the fauld up the brae the sheep bleated and the old yellow dog barked gruffly and often.

Out in the yard, Leezie, the slatternly servant who had left the door open, giggled loudly and emptily, as her untidy skirts blew high about her and displayed a ragged red flannel petticoat and thick ankles to the sheepish gaze of the amorous croft hand. Her vacant laugh went skipping down the hillside.

In the kitchen the little girl who had gone to the window stood very still for a moment, her face pressed dreamily against the pane.

Somehow the loud, unmeaning laugh of idle Leezie hurt her, young as she was, like physical pain, just as so many things in the croft house had power to hurt her. She shrank and quivered sensitively.

But the kind white face of the grandfather clock beamed reassuringly at her from out the closing

shadows. It spoke to her, as so many inanimate things had had a habit of doing since Jeanie died.

"Tick-tock, tick-tock, lassie! I'm nae wrang," it said to her. "Tick-tock! Tut-tut! Dinna fash yersel', my bairn. I'll tell ye when the door of Hell's Glen Hotel opens. It's no time for the honest man's crack and his dram to be ower; and your mither's foot is no on the loch road yet. Ye may rin awa' in peace for a wee while, my lass, wi' your fulish playin' an' dreamin'."

As the fire danced behind its polished bars, the shrouded bags that hung from the rafters cast curious swaying shadows on the whitewashed walls. The edges of the freshly scrubbed floor, still redolent of suds, receded into vague nothingness. The outlines of the furniture became blurred and indistinct, and Leezie's silly laugh had ceased for a space. But in the circle of firelight the rug of rags glowed in a wonderful richness of colour, and the child made believe that they were jewels, ruby and sapphire, emerald and amber, turquoise and jade. She talked softly as she played:

"An' the wee diamon' earrings for you. An' the jet brooches——"

She strung them into wondrous, invisible lengths, and tried their effect every now and again on her hands, running them through her fingers. At one time she lifted a crown of them, a queen's crown for a tiny brown head, yellow like the amber; at another she displayed a string of pearls for a slim, proud throat. And she called coaxingly, ever so softly and ever so insistently, with a very passion of longing to the dream-child with whom she played:

"Jeanie! Jeanie!"

The fire crackled and leaped in startled fashion inside its iron cage. The furniture creaked weirdly as it seemed to listen; and as the little creature bent forward out of the shadows, the light played about her yellow head, her outstretched hand and parted lips. She spoke pleadingly now:

"Jeanie!—Jeanie! Are ye no hearin'?"

It seemed that out of the tense shadows something must move, intangible, mysterious. Then—suddenly—the outer door flew open and a surge of voices came in, an angry one dominating the rest.

"An' to ken," it said, "that a hard-working wumman canna gang to the toon wi' the eggs and butter and tweed, but ye'll a' neglect your work an' waste her time. What dae I pay ye for, Leezie Lindsay, I'd like to ken? To be trapesin' round the place like a daft dog at the heels of a fulish man wha, if he has ony common sense at a', will hae nae time for a trollop like you?"

A gust of the wind and the voice came again, sneering and punctuated by the sullen sobs of the lachrymose Leezie.

"I ken how muckle work *you've* been doin'! The morn's dirt is no aff your face yet! I ken weel what will be the end o' ye, but I'll hae nane o't about *my* house."

"I had just gane oot for the caller air," declared Leezie. She had no wish to be thrust forth from a house renowned from Lochgoilhead to Inveraray for its super-cleanliness. "I'm workit frae morn tae night wi' scrubbin' this bit thing and that bit thing."

"Ye're a puir, feckless body," retorted her mistress shrilly and contemptuously, but more cautiously. She, too, had no mind to lose the one servant who had stayed long with her and endured her tempers and tyranny. "I'll hae nae sauce frae ye ower it. Gang to your wark and stop your hawering, wumman. Has Mister Hardie come hame yet?"

She was already well aware of the answer. The knowledge that at the inn in Hell's Glen Mister Hardie was celebrating one of his wife's rare visits to Inveraray had dawned on her when she remarked that his long lank figure was missing from the ferry steps at Strachur where he had arranged to meet her. She had come up the hill-path in a towering rage, because she knew well from past experience that by now he would be deep in maudlin anecdotes of his famous Irish ancestors who, it appeared, had been mighty warriors in bygone days.

The guid fighting stuff had long been knocked out of indolent, devil-may-care Michael Hardie.

"When he comes hame I'll Irish him!" muttered his long-suffering wife. She had taken off her best dress, reserved for Sundays and market-days, and for rarer diversions, such as funerals and weddings, and now she moved about the house like a ship riding a storm, her skirts tucked high, fishwife fashion, her sleeves rolled to the elbows, displaying plump and capable arms that managed Bald Gourie farm as no other woman on Loch Fyne could. She was ready for even the descendant of the famous Irish fire-eaters. "I'll Irish him!" she kept muttering.

Stout and red of face, not uncomely but panting now with mingled exertion and ire against her absent spouse, she came into the kitchen exclaiming at the fire, low in the grate, the unlit candles and the forgotten lamps, and other evidences of neglect that had accumulated with astonishing rapidity since her departure at day-break.

Now words gushed forth from her like a fountain in full play, now they muttered and rumbled threateningly. She nagged on and on, save for brief pause when breath or flow of words failed her.

"Whaur's the wean?" she demanded, as she hunted in the kitchen for the matches that the heedless Leezie had as usual misplaced.

In the half dark the child heard the query but, clutching the toys which she had not time to hide, she kept very still. Mummie must not see them. Mummie *must not* see anything that had ever belonged to Jeanie, or Jeanie's hands had made.

The spurt of a match and the flicker of a flame, and then, white-faced, very still, with a varied assortment of clay figures clasped to her heart, the silent figure of the child revealed itself out of the shadows.

Mistress Hardie reached out a hand and pulled her forward. She shook her soundly until the yellow head nodded violently.

"Why dae ye no answer me? Why dae ye no?"

(shake, shake). "Standin' there glowerin' at me wi' your big e'en" (she soundly boxed the small ears). "Hae ye a' gane daft i' this hoose?" Then her eyes fell on the toys. "What hae ye there?" she demanded sharply.

She shook the little thing in a sudden passion of anger at her obstinacy, and all at once the toys tumbled forth and fell on the floor, a queer jumble of earth and clay figures, crude but not altogether inartistic. The child gave a fierce, almost inhuman cry as some of them broke. She threw herself down and her protecting arms spread over them. Her feet kicked frantically at the floor.

For the moment the "mud figures," as Mistress Hardie dubbed them, brought no remembrance to that irate woman. She was thinking of the graceless Michael in the cosy hotel, of Leezie the lazy, and she was too roused at the knowledge that her daughter had—most unforgivable of sins—wasted time and neglected her duties. And so it was that she herself brought about the breaking of one Commandment that had its will with that house.

With a rough sweep of her arm the woman brushed the child aside and bent over the queer toys before throwing them on the fire, but a tornado of arms and legs and frantically flying curls hurled itself impotently against her.

The farmer's wife raised her hand to strike, and strike heavily. She would have no child of hers disobey, she shrilled, and then suddenly the voice cried out in terror, almost into her ear:

"Jeanie! Jeanie! Don't let her touch them, Jeanie!"

Mistress Hardie sank down heavily on the floor, like an ox felled by a mortal blow. She stared at the child with dazed eyes. The big kitchen with its red floor and its white walls whirled around her. The lamp flared high, flickered, and for a moment seemed to go out.

The door swung open behind Leezie, her mouth agape, and the air, damp and chill as the grave, rushed

in between mother and child. Mistress Hardie shivered and shrank instinctively. For the first time in her dominating, capable life she knew fear. Fear, too, overpowered the dull curiosity in Leezie's staring eyes.

The child had gathered the fragments together, crooning over them like one daft, and sobbing as she went, a flying half-distraught figure, up the narrow staircase. They heard the patter of her feet on the uncarpeted floor, then again, more deliberately, mounting higher.

Mistress Hardie had risen slowly. She stared stupidly at the staircase where the little girl in blue had vanished. It was her duty now to take down from the wall the leather strap, to follow the child into the room, and to deal out punishment in the thorough and capable manner that distinguished Mistress Hardie's handiwork. Eltrym was wayward at times, and the habit must be thrashed out of her. This passionate scene, however, with its revolt against parental authority and discipline had been something hitherto unknown.

But the steps went on and on, and, in some queer inexplicable fashion, seemed to steal their way into Mistress Hardie's heart as she leaned against the table, not looking at Leezie who still stood, her mouth ludicrously agape, the ruddy colour wiped off her face as by a sponge. They heard a door far up shut, and it roused Leezie with a start. Her round eyes, expressionless as those of a dead cod, rolled in their sockets, as she stared at her mistress, whose lips were so set, whose eyes saw a ghost. Her voice was wafted in a whispering wail across the room.

"Mistress!—Mistress!" she said. "She's gane into the room whaur—Jeanie—deid!"

Then Mistress Hardie woke from her trance and flung round on the frightened maid:

"How *daur* ye?" she cried. "How *daur* ye? Clear oot o' the room at once and get aboot your wark, ye idle hussy!"

Leezie fled before her wrath into the yard, her soiled apron to her face.

"What's up noo?" asked one of the hands. "Is *he* back?"

Leezie shook her head. She glanced cautiously over her shoulder at the house, but the windows stared sightlessly back at her. They framed no angry disapproving face. The house was strangely silent.

But Leezie dropped her voice as if someone might overhear.

"It was a' the wean," she whispered. "She plays wi' Jeanie, ye ken."

The man's slow mind was startled. "But Jeanie's deid lang syne."

The woman nodded. "I ken that weel. But the bairnie winna believe it. She plays on the hill wi' her by the big rocks, and ae nicht last winter, when the mists were deep i' the glens, the twa o' them cam' doon the hill thegither. I saw the pair o' them——" Her voice quavered and broke like a snapped string.

The croft hand took his cutty from his mouth and looked at her. With one grimy hand he scratched his head at a loss for words.

Leezie gazed fearfully round her, as if the fast-gathering shadows were alive.

"I tell ye I saw them quite plainly," said Leezie, "Jeanie a' in white like the mist, an' driftin' and blawin' wi' it. And when Eltrym cam' to me, whaur I stood wi' my feet frozen to the stanes, she whispered to me, 'Jeanie cam' wi' me to-day; she showed me the richt path——'" Leezie stopped again and shivered. "I tell ye, man, the place is haunted."

In the man's pipe the red ashes died slowly. He jerked his shock head towards the house, "Did *she* see it?"

Leezie nodded. "Ay, I think she saw it to-day. I think she mun ha' seen it ganging up the stair—and the wean following."

The wind blew eerily round the grim old house, shrieking contemptuously, and Leezie jumped nervously. The steading frowned at her sullenly as she spoke.

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She dropped her voice almost to a whisper and gazed fearfully over her shoulders again.

"It's the first time ye ken for mony a lang day that the name has been spoken before her. Ye ken aboot Jeanie, may be——"

The door of the kitchen opened abruptly. A shrill angry voice broke across Leezie's reminiscences:

"Ay, there ye are, ye idle guid-for-naething——"
Leezie flew indoors like the wind.

CHAPTER II

BALD GOURIE FARM

*Loughareema ! Loughareema
Lies so high among the heather,
A little lough, a dark lough,
The waters black and deep. . . .*

MOIRA O'NEILL.

If you follow Hell's Glen to Strachur, when you draw near to Loch Fyne you shall see Bald Gourie farm, grey as lichen, beaten with weather if not with age, and clinging like a limpet to a bleak and precipitous hillside.

From the distance on a day of storm or rain it is as one with the giant boulders or those grim rocks that jut fiercely from the summit of the pass.

Far below, by the waters of the loch, the road cuts abruptly round a bend, as if glad to be gone, and from this point a walk of two miles or so will bring you to a cluster of smaller crofts nestling cosily at the foot of slopes of easy ascent.

There, too, the fields are less lonely. Little rosy-cheeked children play among the boulders or along the paths. Clear sweet voices drift through the half-sad, half-tender stillness of the autumnal afternoon. Shawled women gather fallen twigs and branches for firewood; here and there brightly coloured skirts flutter across the road, by the water, or round the open door of hospitable cottages. Carts creak as they pass to or from Strachur and jovial voices call out greetings.

But high up and remote, dour and bleak of aspect, Bald Gourie farm stands apart from the life of the world below. Behind it the fields are gaunt and boulder-

strewn and—save at times for a little yellow-haired girl, in a ragged scarlet cape or a tartan shawl, and a sandy dog barking hoarsely as it rounds up the sheep—the place appears deserted.

To the occasional tourist, pausing to look over his shoulder at the haggard building as he turns the bend of the road, it seemed as if the first wild storm of winter must hurtle it forth sheer down to the tumbling water.

But Bald Gourie was before the Strachur road was, in the days when the McCrimmons were a name to conjure with, and when a tourist or other stranger was a sight to stir a scattered community to its depths. It had been built at one end sheer on to the hill, one with the great mass of rock in the primitive Highland fashion, and though down at Strachur there was plenty of talk nowadays of seasons, and rumours that over two hundred strange folk would make holiday thereabouts, these things were sternly ignored. Bald Gourie held itself remote and aloof from such worldly doings, as the McCrimmons had always done. But there was one in whom none of that practical blood flowed, it appeared.

It was of this that the mistress of the farm and the last of the McCrimmons was now communing aloud as she bustled about the house, finding ever a hundred and one duties. Leezie was swept hither and thither like chaff before the flail of her mistress's tongue. The farm hand whistled low and dispiritedly about his business.

"It was a bad day," said Mistress Hardie, thinking of a certain useless creature of a sex opposite to her own, "that the Glesca Irish ever put foot i' *this* hoose."

In an attic, bare, excepting for a strip of carpet, a truckle bed, and a text about one's sins finding one out, a little girl sat and crooned over a crude figure of earth and clay and stared out of the window.

The only hilarious object was in the distant landscape, a mere speck on the Loch Fyne road. When it approached slowly, and, it must be confessed, somewhat unsteadily nearer, it took on the shape of a tall, thin

man, waving a hat, and evidently imbued with the sheer joy of living.

Had one been closer, one would have heard some stirring addresses to the world at large, delivered with all the eloquence and fervour of a Scottish Irishman in his cups. The solemn face at the window crumpled up and the grave lips actually smiled.

"It's faither!" she spoke to the figure she held against her breast; "and won't he catch it!"

He would indeed! From below came indications of a domestic storm fast brewing and steadily increasing in violence. More than one window looked out on the Loch Fyne road, it seemed. Eltrym tripped to the door and opened it cautiously. Her mother's voice came up the stairs in gusts, more or less indistinct. The lassie listened for a while, and then shook her head. There would be no way of letting faither in quietly to-day. Faither looked as if he and quiet had long parted company.

"It's the Glesca Irish, that's what it is!" Mrs. Hardie was stating definitely to all whom it might concern. "My mither aye propheseed nae guid would come o' the Glesca Irish. 'Ay, lass,' she said to me; 'I ken what I'm speaking aboot. The day you mate wi' ony o' the Glesca Irish, will be a day ye'll rue a' yer life. And not twa bawbees has the man to chap thegither,' says she. 'And what will the people be thinking o' a McCrimmon frae Bald Gourie marryin' into thae drucken ne'er-dae-weels?'"

Other fragments of her cheerful conversation flew up to the attic, bits of self-communings and self-commiseration, and now the self-justification of a sober and righteous woman in anger.

"There's nae daftness in my family. Ay, it's no in my family. It's the Irish comin' oot in the lanesome bairn wi' her dreams o' ae thing and anither. And him wi' his grandmither this an' his grandfather that! My mother said to me, 'It's a' lees; as ye mak' yer bed sae ye mun lie on it. If ye merry a graceless, guid-for-nothing loon, in work for ae week and oot for three, a

man who is looking saft for work and prayin' he may never find it, ye'll be a sorry, sorry wumman,' an' she added, ' looks an' fine words will nae keep ye, my lass.' She warned me, I ken weel ! ”

Eltrym tiptoed to the window. Over the brow of the hill by a narrow path that ran past a tumbledown “dry-stane” dyke the object of wrath was approaching. He was not alone. A sable-hued goat, the last of the clan reared at Bald Gourie, had made its appearance, following like a faithful hound. Judging by his actions from this distance, the graceless one addressed the goat solemnly at intervals; at other times he embraced it affectionately. The ghost of a dimple appeared in the child's cheeks.

“Twa goats ! ” she twinkled gleefully, and laughed with almost uncanny softness.

She opened the window with as little noise as possible and leaned out. Her happy parent, the goat butting him playfully behind, came to a dead stop as she softly called.

He had been a handsome man in his day had Michael Hardie. In spite of his upbringing in Scotland there was the Irish twist to him as surely as if he had opened his eyes in a village in Clare, instead of a but-and-ben by the Tail o' the Bank. A daredevil humour lurked in the dark eyes of him, and, astonishingly enough, like a flash in the pan, it leaped up and glowed all at once in the face looking down at him. A tiny finger wagged at him.

“Whisht, man ! ” said its owner ; “ye're in for it ! ”

A hoarse whisper, loud enough to reach to Inveraray, answered : “Is *she* hame ? ”

“She is that ! An' been waitin' for ye at St. Catherine's Ferry till her feet turned cauld as the stanes. What hae ye done to your hat, faither ? ”

He considered it more soberly, painfully conscious of the necessity of making as prepossessing an appearance as he could. He leaned unsteadily against a post as he inspected the hat. It slowly dawned on him that to show there was no ill-feeling he had previously bestowed

nearly all but the rim of it on some sociable soul in a corner of the "Black Horse." The chap had said there was nae place like Ireland—barring Scotland. Some of the glorious riotry of the stolen afternoon came back to him, some of the might of the famous Irish ancestors. He straightened himself and waved the ragged hat rim to his daughter, anxiously watching him because of a suspicious lull in the eloquence from the kitchen.

"Whisht, man!" she said, finger on lip.

Steps echoed in the passage. In another moment the door would open and the storm of wrath overwhelm him. But the graceless one went down with all flags flying. He flourished his hand to the face at the window and executed a fine bow that nearly tripped him. Then the goat butted him unexpectedly. He sat down, in no wise discouraged, and drank an imaginary bumper to his daughter.

"Here's tae us!" he cried gaily. "God bless us! Whae's like us?"

The serious face crumpled up again. But a voice, in which lurked laughter and a touch of the daredevilry of long-past Hardies, acknowledged the toast in truly hospitable fashion.

"No mony," said the sweet high voice above him. "Mair's the pity!"

Then the attic window shut with a bang as the outer door opened and Mistress Hardie stood on the threshold. A tide of wrath surged round Michael Hardie, a world of scorn enveloped him. The shades of all his Irish ancestors slunk away from him, basely deserting him in the hour of need. He was once more a poor, lone man, in a world that had never understood him. He wept in pity for himself.

"Ay, a braw sicht ye are, Michael Hardie!" said his furious better half. "Ye may weel greet wi' your puir wife slavin' nicht an' day to keep the roof ower your heid, an' warkin' her fingers to the bane, an' her feet cauld as ice waiting for ye at Catherine's Ferry. Are ye comin' in, or are ye gaun to keep me standin' here a' day?"

"Whisht, wumman!" said he coaxingly. He became confidential. "It's just like this. I went in for a single glass—ane, mind ye—and there was a man there frae Glesca——"

The door closed behind them, and the scene of action transferred itself to the kitchen. In the attic the child tiptoed to the door and closed it tightly. These home-comings in the last few years had become more and more frequent.

She remembered once when her father had been very drunk and had confused her with the daughter whose name was never spoken in that house. "Jeanie," he had said, "tell me it's all lies." Something in his voice had hurt then and puzzled her childish heart ever since.

In the room downstairs the nagging went on. It would go on, maybe, for hours, followed by days of sullenness. The temper of Mistress Hardie cast a gloom over every soul in the house.

Even though Eltrym, up in that lonely attic, put her hands over her ears, the sound of words, monotonous and persistent, reached her, clutching as with an iron hand on her heart.

She went to the window and threw it wide. The fresh air, chill with the coming of winter, beat against her. She lifted her face to it. Oh, if she could go keening over the hills with the wind, follow the roads that went on and on somewhere out in the world! She was very little, indeed, to think these things. Perhaps, had not Jeanie gone, she might not have had these thoughts. Perhaps the very greyness of the world about her forced the brilliant exotic flowers of dreams.

She lifted her face and looked over the hill and the water, sparkling cold in the dying light, and far away, black against the sky, she saw the great mountain—the Cobbler—bending over his last.

And the little girl by the window cried out to the giant mountain in a queer chant she had once heard Jeanie cry before she died:

"Oh, Cobbler, Cobbler, mend my life!"

CHAPTER III

THE ROAD OF DREAMS

*Give me a long white road and the grey wide path of the sea,
And the wind's will and the bird's will and the heartache still in me.
. . . And then good night and to bed, and if heels or heart ache,
Well, it's sound sleep and long sleep, and sleep too deep to wake.*

ARTHUR SYMONS.

THE Cobbler could make as well as mend, it seemed. He could make fairy boots and delicate silken shoon for feet that fain would wander at times far from Bald Gourie. Jeanie said so. The Cobbler spun his threads of silver and gold from the sunsets that drifted by him shimmering like iridescent silk or gossamer. He took the tiny wandering stars and strung them into clusters. Sometimes, if you looked very hard, you could see them twinkling and sparkling above his last. He made buckles from the pearls of the dawn, Jeanie Hardie had said—Jeanie, with her brown hair that shone like gold and her scarlet, wistful mouth—in a year long gone by and never to return.

Eltrym did not know that. She only knew that she waited patiently, and that it was she who minded the sheep alone on the quiet hillsides. She had never seen the pearls, though she had often risen specially early, and once she thought breathlessly that she saw rose petals drifting and tossing over the mountains. But they were only baby clouds of the Dawn scudding across a sunrise of flame and gold.

You see, Jeanie had been "queer," too, as Mistress Hardie would have told you. She would have also told you that she could not understand it. There had never been anything of the kind in her family.

Mistress Hardie, more than once since she married,

had called Heaven to witness that none of her family had been daft like that. Good, sensible, God-fearing, self-respecting and respected people had they been, those McCrimmons, known and related from Strachur to the Kyles of Alsh. And then, instead of sons who would have been a blessing in one's old age, there had come two daughters, a good many years between them, but like, so Leezie put it, as "twa peas in a pod," saving always that one had brown eyes and the other blue.

Jeanie had been daft in this way. From a tiny thing she had thoughtless ways with her. You would find her dreaming and talking to herself in the most unexpected places, even on the coldest days, when the frozen ponds with the sphagnum showing beneath looked like giant moss agates dropped from the skies.

When other children sat by the fireside and diligently spun the flax and the yarn, Jeanie would be away roaming the bleak moors beyond the hill, or modelling queer, crude figures out of earth and rubble. It was strange how patiently the fingers, blue with cold, would work out there on the hills or in a cleft of the rocks, where she made what Mistress Hardie called, disparagingly, "mud toys." If you thrashed Jeanie until you were tired you could not cure her of this daftness. Even when she went to school she read voraciously all she could about modelling and sculpture, and one day had even travelled the whole way from Strachur to Inveraray for the sake of a book someone had seen in a window. All these untutored ravings about art were alien indeed to the stern and industrious household of Bald Gourie.

Since Jeanie had long ago travelled a longer and more tragic road, this story has naught to do with her, save in so far as her influence and example affected the yellow-haired Eltrym, who, sharing Jeanie's bed, also shared, despite her tender years, her dreams. Jeanie talked to herself, or the stars, and the little sister listened.

Sometimes, in one of the frequent storms below stairs, they clung together and whispered. Just beyond the bend of the loch, Jeanie assured Eltrym, the road turned and went right out into the world.

There were lulls, of course, between the domestic gales. Mistress Hardie was a shrewd, capable woman, as the neighbours would tell, over-managing perhaps, but a kind, decent body. She wore the breeks. It was understood, with many shakes of the head, that that was the only way to rule the thowless Michael.

For her children Margaret Hardie would have worked her fingers to the bone. The tragedy of it was that, stern and aloof, she manifested none of the affection she must have felt. She had no understanding whatever of Jeanie's talents, only impatience that a daughter of hers showed no pride or interest in housewifery. She had no idea of the world of silence and unstable dreams, into which she had tyrannously driven her children. Ever before they slept they peeped from the window together for one last look at the Cobbler against the sky and chanted softly to him, "Cobbler, Cobbler, mend my life!"

It was only to Eltrym that Jeanie, while she lived by Loch Fyne, voiced her dreams. Jeanie was not much more than a child herself when she slipped out one night from Bald Gourie farm and went round the bend to search for the Road of the World. She was just seventeen, and it was ower young, perhaps, for her to run away like that with little more than dreams in her pocket.

Eltrym leaned from the window silently and watched her go, her wee face the last thing at which Jeanie Hardie looked as she went her way; and it was that, perhaps, which of all else brought her back.

She was to come with silken gowns and radiant jewels that would flash like the loch under the moon, with buckles of pearls for her feet in their dainty shoon, and down by the turn of the road—ever the turn of the road—there would be waiting a carriage and pair, and the harness would glint so brightly that the folk by Bald Gourie and Strachur would think it the flash of the stars, and the horses would toss their plumed heads in disdain at the lone ways of some people. And she was to come for Eltrym and give her all these things, too; that went without saying.

Every night Eltrym had leaned out of the window and watched for the flash like the stars, and listened for the sound of silver bells, and a clear low call by the shining water.

Jeanie had bid her be good and patient while she, Jeanie, made her fortune; it was to be for such a little while. So Eltrym learned to spin and darn, and listen quietly to her mother's homilies. It was in those days that Mrs. Hardie thanked Heaven devoutly that she had been given one sensible daughter! And Eltrym strove to be good, and sometimes was sad, in the very sweetness of her disposition, that she must go away and leave them there. At other times she waited impatiently for the low bird-call by the lake. It seemed a long while since Jeanie had gone.

Then, on a night of storm and rain, Jeanie came back, unheralded, and crept into the warmth of the kitchen, and when Mistress Hardie looked up and saw her daughter she cried out with a loud voice and fell forward with her arms on the table, rocking to and fro, and Michael stood and stared and shook all over, and said stupidly :

“My dochter—not my dochter Jeanie?”

Jeanie stood swaying unsteadily, the door wide open behind her. Her face was white and drawn with pain.

The wind blew her shawl about her, and Leezte stood by, mouth gaping, eyes wandering over Jeanie's altered figure, taking in every detail.

“I hae come hame,” said Jeanie in a pitiful pleading voice. “Ye'll no shut the door on me?”

And before they could answer she had fallen on her face, right on the floor, doubled up in a curious way; and Michael ran forward.

But Mistress Hardie had been quicker. She put her hand over Jeanie's body and warded him back. Her teeth snarled between her parched lips with a sound like a tigress at bay. Her blazing eyes were the eyes of those McCrimmons of old, commanding, imperious, fighting to the last ditch. Leezie slunk before them like a whipped cur from the room. Tall and terrible,

her red hair flaming in the light, she stood up, and even her husband cowered before her.

"Ye winna turn her oot, Bunty." For the first time for years he had called her by that name, and with passionate prayer: "She is oor bairn——"

"Shut the door!" was all she said; and the door had been shut.

From that day it shut out, as only a Scots door can shut, the curious inquiring world round about.

Eltrym had peered long from her window that night for the wonderful carriage and the glint of the harness. Perhaps, because of the storm, she had not heard the bird-call by the lonely lochside. Perhaps Jeanie would come up soon and whisper why she came without the shoes with the braw wee buckles. Maybe it was because the cruel wind had blown away the wonderful velvet cloak, that she wore only that ugly ragged shawl. Soon Jeanie would come and tell her all about it.

She waited and waited, but Jeanie did not come. They had carried her instead up to the lone room in the attic, and towards dawn Eltrym had wakened out of a confused dream of excited voices and hurried footsteps.

Had she looked from the window then she would have seen, far down by the water, the gleam of lights. But she lay shuddering, because of a strange wild cry that had rung through the house, as if all the agonised winds of the world went shrieking by, beating past over the hills and far away.

It was just at the stormy dawn that her father had come into Eltrym's room and, lifting her without a word, carried her out and up the stairs. Jeanie had wished it so.

The child lived through a scene that for ever (but later with more meaning) was burned on her memory.

Jeanie lay white and frail in the narrow bed in the hitherto unused attic. She had spoken in a queer gasping way as if her strength were spent. They said afterwards, ere they closed and locked that book of

memories, that Jeanie Hardie had raved ere she died, that she spoke no sense at all at the last.

But the child had understood dimly.

"Oh, Little Thing—Little, Little Thing," said Jeanie to Eltrym. "The Cobbler is still there. And the dreams, some of the dreams—only we did not know. Ye were never told—if only we had been told."

Eltrym had cried out all her disappointment. "Jeanie, ye didna come back wi' the horses an' the harness glitterin', after a'! Oh! Jeanie, will it no come true? Are ye gaun awa' again? Whaur will ye be gaun, Jeanie?"

And Jeanie rallied and spoke as if in answer.

"Just—round—the bend of the road," said Jeanie very clearly, as on that day long ago, and then she sighed and closed her eyes and went her way. The shadow of the Bend fell upon them as she passed.

In a corner of the room Mistress Hardie stood up straight as the dark firs behind Bald Gourie farm. They all knelt as she laid her hand upon the Bible. The old doctor, whose trap waited by the water, heard as he went downstairs the voice begin, stern and unfaltering as the Spartan mother's of old:

"Our Father Which art in heaven . . . Forgive us our trespasses——"

Little Eltrym fell asleep again, her head against her father's heaving shoulder.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHEPHERD'S HUT

*The wind blows out of the gates of day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away,
And the fairies dance in a ring apart.*

W. B. YEATS.

OFTEN when she was minding the sheep that cropped the scant grass on the slopes behind Bald Gourie farm, Eltrym Hardie would climb on that side of the hill away from the house, to the great clump of boulders which were heaped there, as if flung out disdainfully in some long-past convulsion of the earth's surface.

For a while the sheep and the urgent need of their "minding" because of "the dour Body ower the hill," whose lands adjoined, would be forgotten. Always, to the dreaming bairn, the world around was a new and wonderful place, shining in sun, wreathed in mist, or shadowed and glowing with the ever-changing seasons. From the knoll of rocks the roads far down looked like narrow ribbons winding and unwinding to the wandering rhythm of her dreams.

She watched people, tiny black dots, pass along them far below, and in thought went with them, spoke to them. They were all bound far beyond Strachur through Hell's Glen and right away to a wonderful world—and they were all wonderful people. They went around the bend of the road where Jeanie had gone.

And one day, with her dreaming and forgetting, some of the sheep did stray through the old dyke of loose and broken stones and went on to the forbidden land.

The "dour Body ower the hill " had inspired terror of consequences in her mind from the first day she had been set to tend the sheep. He was from England, and had bought as much as he could of the land about. He had been angry that he could not buy Bald Gourie as well. Dark stories of his dourness, of what he would say and do if the sheep strayed even one yard on his desolate land, haunted her now as she counted the sheep again anxiously.

They must have strayed as she sat there dreaming and exulting in the shifting lights and shadows on far Ben Lui and grim Ben Cruachan, and watching the Cobbler with his giant shoulders hunched against the skyline and the ragged clouds gathering sombrely about his head. Then had come a drop of rain on her face, the far-off mutter of thunder, as she sat there dreaming, resting her elbows on her knees, her face framed in her hands.

Storms came rushing in at this time of the year, and she saw far off the giant flail of the rain flash in the last disappearing light of the sun. A bleak cold wind was driving heavy clouds across the sky. The storm would pass perhaps as quickly as it was racing now from mountain to hillside. Far below, Loch Fyne lay placid and contemptuous, because the time of real tempests was not yet.

But the sheep were picking their way, bleating complainingly, towards the shelter of the rocks, and it was then she had counted them and in a panic realised that some were missing. She had climbed on to the highest rock, her figure in her faded heliotrope frock matching with the lichen and dying heather.

Towards Bald Gourie the hill sloped precipitously; the house hanging as if suspended between it and the water of the loch. There was no sign of the sheep there. On the other side, as she turned, the land stretched more gently away, broken here and there beyond the dry-stone wall by clumps of rock. Against a mass of brown rock and loose-piled stones, far down on the dour Body's place, was the ruin of an old hut,

half hidden by its black belt of firs. She thought she saw something move for a moment against its darkness.

She forgot the storm that was racing towards her in the fear of what would happen if her mother found that the sheep had strayed again, if the dour Body who owned the new big house tucked out of sight behind the hills should chance to come that way. She must get the sheep off his land as soon as possible.

She began to run, stumbling down the slope and across the field, and the thunder rumbled menacingly. She saw the rain like a vast silver onrushing horde, hissing and muttering as it raced across the remoter fields. There was no shelter behind or before but the distant dreaded hut, staring at her with its cold hostile eyes as she drew near. A gust of wind flung her against the shut door. A whirl of rain spat furiously in her face as she clung with all her strength to the iron latch. The wind howled by, full of a thousand voices.

Fear of this lonely hut with its uncurtained windows surged over her for a moment. She had imagined that she heard voices. Then there came to her the bleating of the sheep within, startled as if they heard her at the door, which the wind must have slammed to behind them.

She tugged at the door then, and it opened. The rain swept in behind her. For a moment the interior was dark, deserted, save for a faint glimmer of white at the far end where the sheep huddled. She called to them breathlessly.

Then out of the depths of the hut a girl's voice said fretfully :

"Come in, do ! Can't you see you're letting in the rain ?"

She turned to flee, but a hand reached out and pulled her in. Someone laughed, and a voice with a drawl in it, a man's voice this time, said :

"Poor kid ! She's almost wet through. Look at her, Leila !"

"I *am* looking, and I'm looking at the open door as

well. I shall get a fresh chill. You forget that I've no coat on, and mother would have a fit if she knew I was in a draught, especially in this damp, musty old place. You know I'm not at all strong, Cecil, really, and I never can understand what you can see in these desolate moors and bleak fields."

The voice was distinctly petulant. Its owner sat on an upturned box, over which was spread a man's coat, by the ruined fireplace. Eltrym, standing by the door, her heart beating fast, stared at her. She thought she had never seen so lovely a creature, with her dark curling hair and her pretty discontented face.

She went on talking as if Eltrym were non-existent. "You know I told you there would be a storm, Cecil, and it was too far to walk. But you would go. And now we will be drenched."

The boy, for he was little more, shut the door abruptly and went back to her. He put his arm about her shoulders, and from the shadows the child watched, wide-eyed, breathless. The couple seemed completely to forget her existence.

"But you're not a scrap wet, Leila dear," he was saying. The light from the murky window fell on his face, strong and eager, and at the moment loving and anxious. "We got here just in time; and the storm will soon be over. Buck up, Leila, you're surely not afraid of a passing storm like this."

But the girl shivered perversely.

"It will be at least an hour or more. I hate being shut up like this. It is most boring, and I hate being bored; and you know how anxious mother will be."

A peal of thunder shook the heavens and rattled and crackled like musketry among the hills. Leila gave a scream and then clung to Cecil, white and breathless. He knelt down and held her head tight against his breast, soothing her as he would a child.

Out of the shadows by the door two eyes stared at them, wide and wondering, watching these two strange beings, with their strange voices from another world.

The girl was talking of dinner now. "We shall be late for dinnah," she said in her affected speech.

Who were they? Where did they come from? Then a shiver of apprehension passed over Eltrym. The feared Body ower the hill came from England. It would surely be the real English these two were speaking. Then—these two people would be from *his* house! Visions of disaster rose up in front of her. Did he not have notices everywhere about trespassing?

For a wild moment she had a thought of opening the door and driving the sheep out of the hut into the storm and rain and fleeing after them. She did not mind the rain, but she minded the Body's wrath. She raised her hand to the latch, and the boy turned on the instant.

"Why, the kid!" he exclaimed in remorse. "We'd forgotten all about her!" He spoke to her across the room. "Come over here, little one, won't you?"

He got up to his feet and held out his hand to her. His young, eager face smiled at her.

At something kind and reassuring in his voice the child went, albeit slowly. She stood before them in the faint light of the window, quite silent. The dark-haired girl regarded her in some amusement. Her eyes travelled over the queerly attired figure, the ragged shawl, the bare, brown feet. The child looked not at her but at Cecil.

"Ye'll no tell the Body," she said at last.

"The Body?" Then he laughed. "Oh! you mean my father! What should I tell him? That you sought the shelter of a deserted shepherd's hut?"

"There's a' the big words on the posts," she reminded him, unconvinced.

"Oh, that's only to scare away the crows!" he answered and laughed down at her. "Not lassies like you. *You* can come and go as you will, *minus* the sheep, of course."

She shook her head. The meaning of his words, rather than the words themselves, reached her.

"He would be sair angry that the sheep strayed," she replied. "He's the dour man."

They both laughed, and the pretty girl said lightly, "He is, indeed, at times. What a queer thing she is, Cecil, and where does she hail from? I didn't think there was a house within miles. They must be very poor people. Do they always dress like that about here?"

"I come frae Bald Gourie farm," the child protested shortly. She did not like this girl for all her prettiness, curling hair and dark lashes. All the proud Scot combated patronage.

"Bald Gourie farm!" The girl turned to the boy she had addressed as Cecil. "Isn't that the old place you can see from the road by the loch? Rather a ripping position but a haunted-looking spot. And wasn't that the farm your father wanted to buy and couldn't? He was going to pull it down, wasn't he, and build the Towers below it?"

Cecil nodded carelessly. "I believe so, but there's pride and poverty this side of Glasgow as well as Edinburgh way," he added, as if teasing her.

She tossed her head. "Oh! but there is a difference in the people. We are more refined. Everybody says so. English folk know that we are."

"They get plenty of telling," he laughed, shrugging his shoulders. He could quote Scots, it seemed, for he sarcastically added, "Well, if he is born in Glasgow, a man's a man for a' that."

He bent towards Eltrym now and spoke to her, while the rain lashed against the window behind her. "Do you know who said that?" he asked.

She nodded her fair head. "Bobbie Burns," she said with pride. "I ken him weel."

He looked at her, amused with her solemnity, and leaned back against the old chimney-piece. He was a tall lad and towered above her.

"Will ye recite for a penny?" he asked with a smile.

She frowned. "I'll no tak' ony penny," she said sullenly, and deliberately turned her back on them both.

In the silence that followed the girl with the dark curls laughed as if it entertained her. But before the laugh ended the boy had bent down and touched Eltrym on the shoulder. He turned her face round and saw the tears well in the blue eyes too proud to let them fall. He was up against the pride that would not allow old Bald Gourie to be sold.

"I am sorry about the penny," he said. "I was only teasing you. Won't you forgive me?" He gravely held out his hand, and after a moment's hesitation she put hers in it. He gave the weather-browned hand a squeeze of compunction.

"Now we are friends," he said solemnly, "aren't we?"

She nodded, her eyes on his face, searching and considering. Then as he smiled, the queer little face, so stiff and prim in repose, smiled too.

The girl behind them moved restlessly. "What a funny boy you are, Cecil!" and yawned as she went to the window. She could not understand why Cecil, usually so fastidious, could be bothered with this untidy ragamuffin. She wished the rain would leave off and they could go. It was fearfully boring to have to sit here while there was ever so much doing up at the Towers. She wanted her tea, and she thought of the delicious hot brown scones, and the yellow butter, and the English butler bringing in the steaming tea on the big silver tray.

But Cecil was talking as he always talked to children. She shrugged her shoulders. She could not see anything in that awful child. Once it pleased her, as showing a new and tender side of his character and one to be desired in one's future husband. Now it bored her. She felt no interest whatever in this tangle-haired creature with her eyes too big for her small thin face which wind and sun had tanned as brown as a berry. Her own complexion was a delicate thing of milk and roses, and was carefully kept so.

"And what else do you do while you're minding the sheep?" Cecil was saying interestedly.

"I watch the roads, and the people ganging along. And sometimes I walk a wee bit o' the way wi' them."

"But how can you mind the sheep if you do that? It's a long way down to Strachur, isn't it?"

She nodded. "But I just go wi' them, ye ken."

Her meaning flashed to him. "And do they talk to you?"

"They tell me everything," she said with pride. "An' they're going to Strachur, and Inveraray, and Glesca, and Edinboro, and some of them awa' to Lunnon." Her voice, shrill and eager, dropped suddenly as she found the "strange leddy's" eyes on her. She withdrew abruptly into her shell, like a startled tortoise.

"Tell me more of what they say," he begged, but for a moment she would not. She hung her head. Then the "strange leddy" looked out of the window again and yawned aloud.

"But you sing," he coaxed. "Didn't you tell me you sang?" He put his arm about her as he had put it about the pretty lady. "Tell me, Little Thing."

How long had it been since she had been called that? A sob of sheer longing for Jeanie rose in her throat.

She shook her head. "I canna sing." Then she looked at him shyly, "But sometimes I mak' songs for mysel'."

"You make songs?" Almost a laugh was on his lips at the quaintness of this ragged creature in her tattered shawl. Then he said gravely, "Can you remember one now?"

She hesitated. "They come and they go. But there was ane this morning aboot the Cobbler and the heather dyin'——"

A dreamy look came over the small childish face. The wistful mouth softened into happier lines. The beautiful eyes lost their watching, listening look.

"Yes? Go on!" he said. Over her bent head he flung a quick glance of warning at Leila Gowan, who was about to laugh. "Tell me——"

Eltrym clasped her hands and looked away from him, as if her eyes saw, past the rain-blurred pane, all the earlier glory of the morning. The rose petals had fluttered across the hills then. Her lips moved, and he had to bend his head to hear. She spoke in a low voice, half-chanting, half-singing, as if to herself :

“The wind comes keening over the grass
Crying, crying, as I sit on the hill,
And the sheep go bleatin’ amang the stanes
Where the road goes winding, winding awa’,
And sayin’ for ever, ‘Come, too, come, too.’
An’ some day I will gang, and follow the road,
And go by the loch and past Strachur
And out to the loch and come not back,
The road and I will go wanderin’ on—
The road and I will go wanderin’ on.”

She stopped abruptly, and became conscious of the way he was staring at her. She went crimson, and her mouth fell into its sullen lines.

“Why—you queer child!” he cried suddenly. He touched her head. “And of course you will go to Lunnon one day if you keep on like that. You must learn to write your songs down and keep them until I come again, will you not? Leila, listen.”

But Leila had risen. “The rain has stopped,” she said coldly.

She stood with her back to the window, and her shadow fell between him and Eltrym.

“But, Leila”—he, too, had risen—“this is unique. Why, if she really made up those songs herself——”

Leila shrugged her shoulders. She was frankly bored.

“I don’t suppose she did; but if you’re so interested,” she suggested, “you have plenty of other days in which to listen, surely.” She pouted. “It doesn’t seem to matter whether I feel cold and tired. Of course if you fancy you have discovered a budding poet and see business, I can go on and leave you to follow!”

The shaft of sunlight struck the window and sent

its pale light into the room. Leila moved towards the door. If they did not hurry they would be in for another rainstorm. Really, it was too bad of Cecil. It was absurd of him to think that ragged creature had any genius.

Genius, anyway, did not matter to Leila, except in the degree it might financially contribute to the welfare of Findlay and Anderson, publishers, and of Cecil Anderson. For a moment the youth hesitated at his fiancée's imperious demands.

From the open door a chill wind blew between them and set the dead leaves rustling and stirring. He turned to say good-bye to the child. Her face was thin and wan, but the eyes were really beautiful, very clear and blue as they looked up at him now.

"When you have grown up," and perhaps he was thinking of Leila then, "maybe you will have given over listening to the songs the winds and the mountains make."

He touched her hand lightly. "Good-bye, little one. If I come another day you will make some songs for me, won't you? And you must write them down and keep them for me to see; and you will send them to me to London when you are older. Perhaps," and he smiled at the intent face, "you will go to London one day yourself. You would like that, wouldn't you?"

She nodded, her eyes on his face. He did not know how she would treasure up the words he had spoken, how deep they would lie in her passionately adoring child-heart. To Cecil, apart from the interest she had evoked, they were little more than the kind words he gave to any child. If he came that way again he would look her up, if he remembered. In the meantime Leila, lovely and petulant, waited impatiently, her back turned to them in calm contempt. So he went, but smiled at Eltrym in a way which warmed the frozen heart, and which she always cherished.

Then he went out of the hut. Through the open door, the child, clutching her ragged shawl about her

shoulders, saw the primrose light of the sun after rain playing about his head.

The sun was sinking. Soon it would be behind the mountains where the shadows, black as velvet, were already gathering. The sky was flecked with clouds, struggling in the wake of the storm. The rocks, wet and glistening, were rainbow-hued. The two figures went down the hill, swaying closely together as they walked, the boy's head bent. Neither of them looked back at the child who watched them go.

Eltrym came to the door, driving the sheep before her. She moved out of the half-darkness of the hut into the fleeting glory of the day. Her shabby cloak fluttered in the wind, and she drew it about her head. Her face looked out of it, wondering, eager. She gazed down the hill where those two figures were wending their way.

Soon they would be at the turn of the slope and out of sight. She watched them as they went, outlined against the fading, crocus-coloured glow, the girl in her scarlet sport-coat and cap that flamed brightly against the sombre landscape. Then they climbed a knoll. When they went over it they would pass from sight. The figure in the ragged shawl watched. They stood still for a brief while, these two figures against the immensity of sky and mountain. For a moment Cecil and Leila leaned their faces together, then went down the hill.

But as they embraced, the boy looked back over his shoulder and said :

"That wee lassie ! I wonder what will become of her ? Leila, did you notice what wonderful eyes she had—so old and grave for such a nipper ? I wonder"—he turned to look back, and waved his hand carelessly as he saw her watching—"I wonder just what life will make of her in time to come, or what she will make of life ?"

But Leila was thinking of other things. She pointed to the sunset, its glory of red and gold, its gorgeous purples and tender emeralds. She was pleased to wax enthusiastic for once about it.

"Look, Cecil, at the ripping sunset. Isn't it top-hole?"

They stood and watched a moment. Then they disappeared over the brow of the hill and away by the hut; Eltrym went soberly on her way, driving the sheep before her. She folded them in and closed the hurdles. The darkness fell while she stood there, motionless and silent.

The day had been as a dream that had come and gone, but all its after radiance still clung to her. It would last for a long, long while. Suddenly the hill-slope was no longer lonely or threatening. She had found a friend; she had spoken, in reality, not in dreams, to someone who walked the roads of the world, to someone who would come again. Had he not told her to make more songs? He had said also that she must write them down. Her eyes were troubled at that. She must set her mind to the writing and reading.

She spoke to the old Cobbler as she turned indoors, the old Cobbler who bent for ever over his last, but always listened and sometimes answered. Gravely she bent low before him and recited all that she wanted. Across the silence came the sound of an opening door. A flood of light flashed on the stone pathway. A shrill voice called her sharply out of her dreams.

"What are ye loiterin' for?" it demanded. "Lazy, idle, feckless creature!"

But as she obeyed she whispered, "Cobbler, I have found a friend. He will tell me all about the world if I sing him my songs. He will come again some day. And I will go to school and learn to write. I will try hard, and when he comes back——"

But the Cobbler, with his head among the stars, looked into the future, and knew that to-morrow would mean the years. Maybe he sighed as he sewed.

CHAPTER V

THE LIFTED VEIL

*O Water, voice of my heart, crying on the sand ;
All night long crying with a mournful cry
As I lie and listen and cannot understand.*

ARTHUR SYMONS.

ONE afternoon, five years later, Eltrym Hardie climbed the hill towards the old hut. Time moves slowly, almost imperceptibly, when one is young, and at Bald Gourie one day was often but a replica of another.

She had grown quieter, queerer than ever, so they said of this slim, long-legged creature, who walked the hill-way now, sobbing fiercely as she went, her thin shoulders bent, her red shawl with its ragged fringe a splash of colour in the August sunlight.

She still carried, almost unconsciously, her primitive schoolbag with the books she had hastily gathered in that spasm of rage and something that was almost fear, when she passed out of the village school for the last time.

She held her head proudly, because of the inquisitive, leering faces, clustering together and peering after her as she banded the school yett behind her. A freckled face, surmounted by a mop of carrot hair, was the one thing she saw very distinctly ever afterwards, to be hated with all the intensity of a passionate nature—the face of the girl who that day had sneered at the very mention of Jeanie and had called after her, “Good riddance o’ bad rubbish !” and then the jeering words that had aroused a world of hostility and stubborn determination.

“Ay, but your mither will be bringin’ ye back i’ the

afternoon, I ken!" some of the other children called out with a taunting laugh.

Eltrym said nothing. Her face, white and pinched, turned on them, the eyes, darkly blue, almost black, blazed at them; then, with a toss of her yellow head, she went her ways. One or two of the bairns rushed away to tell the teacher breathlessly that Eltrym Hardie was "ganging hame in the denner-hour."

But Eltrym went on, her head high, for all the childish fear of a teacher's authority. Though her legs trembled beneath her, she went on and on, out of sight. She did not even look back to see whether the pleasant kindly dominie was watching her, his old rheumy eyes blinking short-sightedly behind his glasses.

She had said in her heart then what she was saying now as she climbed the hillside:

"I will not go back—I will never, never gang back again!"

It had seemed easy in that hour to defy the teacher's anger and the wrath of the world, to come storming up the long road from Strachur, to fling open the heavy kitchen door of Bald Gourie, to pass goggle-eyed Leezie, giggling helplessly at something she could not understand, and to enter the room, with its red-brick floor and white-washed walls, where Mrs. Hardie was churning the butter.

The red hand, plunged deep into the churn, withdrew itself, and the farmer's wife opened her mouth in shrill question at her daughter's entrance at this early hour. The child said to her:

"I am no going back to schule again!"

Something in the white face, the voice, and the tragic eyes held her mother silent for a moment. Then her lips set and her eyes went hard and cold:

"Ye'll gang to schule the morn!"

"I'm no going to schule again!" It was the clash of one stormy will against another, which had for so long been gentle and uncomplaining. Mrs. Hardie stared at this young daughter of hers, with her flushed face and shining hair as if a ghost had risen out of the

grave, and all at once her hands to which the butter clung in creamy lumps, shook like an aspen. For the girl had said one thing else: "Why did ye never tell me, mither?"

Then Eltrym rushed from the room as suddenly as she had entered. Mrs. Hardie heard her sobbing as she went. For a long while the woman stood as if turned to stone. She knew instinctively what had happened. Her eyes, indeed, saw a ghost.

"It's thae brats o' Macphairsons," she muttered, "with their auld heads an' sharp tongues, like that o' the mither hersel'!"

She stopped churning and went to the window. Up the hillside climbed the red-shawled figure, passionately sobbing. Mrs. Hardie felt strangely helpless as she gazed after the girl, and the impulse was strong on her to follow, to question and console. A gust of tenderness swept over her.

"She is ower young at fifteen to ken," she said rather helplessly. She looked out of the window for a spell, and then pulled herself up with an effort. There was butter to be churned and bread to be baked. She had other work to do than toil up hill after a wean that had openly defied her authority. Perhaps in her heart, as she turned and blustered about the kitchen, she shrank from explanation. Her daughter's eyes had stabbed her with their pain, had, maybe, opened a wound that still ached. Those who know best judge not the Scot by the outward aspect.

And up the hill, climbing so fast that her heart thudded almost to suffocation, the child said over and over with a bitter cry:

"I'll no gang back—I'll no gang back!"

And it seemed as if the taunting voices followed after her, as if the eyes of the school-children were thrown over her like a searchlight, some of them unfriendly, some wide and wondering and not understanding, and some kind, albeit questioning. Childhood can be so hard and hypercritical, so intolerant and cruel in its judgments.

It had all come about through the winning of a prize which "thae Macphairsons" had coveted, which would have been surely theirs had this girl of Hardie's not come to school, and, mounting steadily higher and higher, forged her way to the top of the class.

There had been a few scoffing words, a childish outburst of temper, and then a fragment of gossip, overheard and only partly understood, flung as a challenge.

"Wha are ye, onyway?" had demanded a young Macphairson. "Mither says Jeanie was nae better than she should be, and that ye're no respectable, Eltrym Hardie. There's nae disgrace in oor house."

The taunting voices followed and followed as she walked blindly on.

All around her in the soft sunlight of the early afternoon the stony land lay bare and bleak, desolate as the childish, passionate heart. It was a clear August day, scented with leaves, ruddy and gold, and flaming here and there like fire against the hills that had not yet lost their greenness. The wind in the pines and the firs was murmuring softly like a far-off sea. If one listened one heard the sound of waves on the shingle and saw the blue water tumbling lazily in. But to-day the little ears that heard so much which no one else heard were deaf. The eyes were blind with the rush of tears long repressed, hot and burning as they fell on the thin cheeks. Around her as she went the sheep fed placidly, their grotesque shadows moving slowly with them. They lifted their heads to gaze at her with their mild, wondering eyes. Always she had spoken to them as if they were her children, calling them with her sweet, high voice. But to-day this was someone new and strange who went by them sobbing, sobbing. The sheep bleated, startled and uneasy at something that had dimly come into their world and then passed by. The old yellow sheep-dog, bounding towards her, sure of a welcome, had been pushed aside. He sat on his shaggy haunches and blinked after her; then slowly keeping in the background, but ever ready to wag his tail if she looked round, he began to follow.

All Eltrym wanted was to be alone, quite alone. Even the boulders that topped the knoll were grim, sardonic eyes that watched her pass. She dared not look back at them. In a rift in their shadow was the hiding-place of Jeanie's figures, guarded as in a sanctuary. Before them had burned the glowing lamp of Eltrym's heart.

Now that heart was hurting dully and terribly. She was so young, she had been so ignorant, and yet suddenly, at that first rude touch, when the veil had been torn aside she saw so clearly. The precocious child who had taunted her had made her see.

Far below Bald Gourie, half in shade, half in sunlight, jutted out desolately from the hillside, and towards Strachur the road, ere it turned the corner, looked sombrely at her over its shoulder, the road on which the gay carriage and pair were to wait, the harness all glittering, like silver in the sun.

"Jeanie! *Jeanie!*"

She uttered the words aloud with a cry, then flung herself on the ground, shaking and quivering like an aspen in the breeze, and Jeanie's small, dear face rose before her, the eyes turned to the road, the brown head shining.

Jeanie had been so young when she had followed the road, so full of ambitions and dreams. All the delicate beauty of her, the glowing colour of her surged back to memory. Jeanie whispered again in the bedroom of all that was to come to pass. But now a tragic figure sinning, sinned against, walked past Eltrym, sobbing along the hills, the mud of sin and shame clinging to her skirts.

The child groped her way to her feet, stumbled over the brow of the hill and down again. She began to run like one possessed, away from the whispering voices. The old hut, with its dark belt of trees, looked at her with friendly eyes. Far round the bend was the unseen house from which had once come a lad and a lassie to stir strange longings and dreams into life.

She had never been to the hut again, but there had

not been a day since that she, minding the sheep, had not looked up and visioned the coming of the lad with the eager face and curly hair. Now she never wanted him to come again. Perhaps it was knowledge of the dark shadow that lay on the house at Bald Gourie that had stayed his coming as he had promised. To a child a given promise is sacred and unbreakable.

But she had kept for him in her heart the strange songs that had come drifting to her over the hills. There had been so many since he had gone; songs tender and exultant, breaking into blossom with the springs that came, even if reluctantly, to the bare hills; glowing and golden in the summer; wistful and longing later for things that could not be; ominous and heavy at times in the winter, because of a fate that, maybe, had decreed that life must be always and always like that, day after day, year after year.

When one was so young the days were kind in their shortness, rounded off by sleep that fell even as one's face barely touched the pillow. But all the dreams were crumbling and broken, like Jeanie's poor clay figures, hidden out of sight in a great rift in the rocks. Something in Eltrym's heart now turned hard and cold, fierce and bitter. Girlhood, half-childhood, is like that in its reasoning, born of inexperience and want of knowledge of the living world of men and women and the passions of earth.

She stood for a moment and the wind blew the ragged red cloak about her tragic figure; then she threw her books from her and ran down the slope towards the distant hut, half stumbling over the loose stones and boulders.

On the valley road, turning his face contemplatively towards a suggested short cut across the hill and obviously unsure of his way, a lad saw the flame of the red cloak of the flying figure. High up, the hut frowned darkly at him. He thought it a blot on the clear reach of the hillside.

But to the passionate lassie the hut had beckoned. It had said to her:

"Here is solitude! Here you are safe, away from the things of the world!"

The open door swung back on broken hinges, the interior was desolate and neglected, damp and musty with the drifted debris of the years. Half the roof was gone, for storm and the winter rains and neglect had done their work. The floor was cluttered by decaying, wind-blown leaves of past autumns, but the sun fell softly through the broken roof on the old fireplace, with its bricks still glowing faintly here and there, and its deserted hearth where moss and lichen, emerald and grey and rust-coloured, were gathering.

The child went inside, and passionately flung herself down until the sobbing wore itself out.

When she came to the door again the sun lay level and low on the hill that dipped away and away to the black belt of trees and the half-hidden valley road.

Years afterwards she remembered how little and old and lonely she felt as she stood thus, how she had knelt down on the damp leaves by the rotting door and tried to pray and words would not come. The grey bare fields of her life were now devastated as if by some sudden cyclonic disturbance. All her dreams collapsed in ruins about her. And Jeanie—but of Jeanie she dared not think lest shame and bitterness overwhelm her utterly.

Eltrym was a McCrimmon in this, in the strict and uncompromising belief in godliness, chastity and sobriety, in the stern Scriptural injunctions against sin, and the attitude, not altogether Pharisaical but born of the teachings of the centuries, against the sinner. Something in her heart shut now like a door. She did not know that even then the hands of love were beating against it.

How she had longed—poor desolate heart—for someone to come across these fields, no matter whom it might be, and say some comforting word! She thought of that now as she crouched by the threshold, bent with a bitter sense of injury and desolation.

Perhaps so coming the lad with the eager eyes would

see the bundle of books, lying discarded where the sheep browsed, the books that had once seemed so full of wonderful, ever interesting things.

The sun was sinking very slowly. The majestic hills towered up to meet it, their shaggy sides black and purple with shadow. Behind them no longer lurked dreams, but things born of sin and the devil.

She sat on the old stone doorstep and stared before her. Her eyes and her head ached dully and persistently. She wanted to run away somewhere, anywhere—away from the sneering or pitying faces. Surely, out in the world there were laughter and brightness and happiness. If she stayed here life would go on and on, always the same. She would grow old and bitter and hard, like a sister of her mother's who sometimes came to visit them. And always from Hell's Glen to Strachur and maybe to Inveraray there would be folk who would shake their heads and whisper when Bald Gourie was mentioned.

She was such a young creature to be thinking these things, sitting there with her small, grave face, her red shawl drawn tight about her shoulders.

The very loneliness and repression of her life at Bald Gourie farm, the stern McCrimmon training of her mother, the weaknesses of her father, had made her older than her years, quieter and more thoughtful than other children, and yet at fifteen she had been intensely young and innocent in heart until this day. Now everything was black and marred with evil. The very shadows slunk by her, full of meaning.

Across the turf a lad was making his way, carefully picking his steps towards the hut. In the years that followed he always kept first in his methodical mind that picture of Eltrym Hardie as he saw her then—Eltrym in her ragged red shawl, her rough short dress that showed the long slim legs, the yellow tangle of hair that curled and blew about her eyes.

She had risen as soon as he spoke and in a startled, half-defensive way one brown hand flew up and held the shawl close about her chin. Her eyes glowered at him

somewhat defiant and sullen. The colour that had flooded her pale face when she first turned her head and saw him receded. For one instant, perhaps, she had believed the dream-lad had come back.

But she looked into eyes that were grey and very direct in expression, and almost too stern even then, at dark curls instead of fair, at a face browned by the sun and love of outdoor sport. Rather a handsome lad in his way was Sandy MacKinnon.

He carried a bag of books in his hand, her bag of books. The colour rushed distressed to her face.

"You dropped them," he said abruptly, standing there in the field, the sun red behind him.

Something flamed rebelliously in her, and rebel as well as Scot answered him:

"I flung them there."

"You flung them awa'? What for?" He rapped out the question as if he were addressing a schoolroom. She felt suddenly a very little girl indeed before him. "What did you throw guid books awa' for? You ken you canna get them for naething."

She turned her face abruptly from him, muttering something. His gaze and his abruptness of speech, even for Strachur, were disconcerting.

"What did ye say?" he demanded. He bent his head. "Speak louder, lassie, I canna hear ye."

She did speak louder. The words rushed from her. "I threw them there because I'm no gangin' back to schule again. So noo ye ken. Onyway, it's naeboddy else's business."

Her flashing eyes showed she resented his air of authority.

He threw back his dark curly head and laughed a short quick laugh.

"I'm thinking it is my business. And why are ye no' gangin' back, lassie?"

"Because I winna."

He planted his legs apart, his hands in his pockets.

"And have ye a' the say in that?" he asked genially enough.

Her face quivered and a swift vision of her Spartan mother came to her. But she said nothing. Only the eyes regarded him darkly blue and smouldering with intensity of feeling, but the red mouth began to quiver.

He saw then for the first time that she had been crying, and all at once he felt a clumsy fool for lingering. The child obviously did not want to talk. She was unhappy and distressed over something. He looked behind her at the ruined hut which, from the valley road, he had thought occupied. On that side of the hill no other dwelling was to be seen. Then light came to him.

"You're frae Bald Gourie?"

She nodded.

"Then maybe ye'll can tell me the way there. Is it ower yon hill?"

Silently she assented, pointing the road. Her eyes, behind their sullenness and unhappiness, harboured scarcely any curiosity, though strangers at Bald Gourie were rare indeed. She was wrapped round by the apathy of a great weariness.

"Do the McCrimmons still live there?"

"They are all gone, the McCrimmons, except my mother. Her name now is Hardie." She looked at him dubiously. Was this one of her father's people of whom she had heard so much? "Do ye come frae Ireland?" she asked him.

He threw back his head in characteristic fashion and laughed.

"Ay, Sandy," he said humorously aloud to himself, "an' wi' a singsang like yours tae." He smiled down at her. "Maybe ye hae never heard o' Glesca?"

"Indeed, an' I hae heard of it often. It's a pair place."

"It's the best place in the world," he said to her, sudden warmth in his voice. His eyes challenged and scorned denial. "Ye can hae your prood Edinboros an' your Aiberdeens an' your Dundees"—with one wave of the hand he metaphorically made her a gift of the lot—

"but Glesca for me an' ony ither sensible body. We're cock o' the walk. What would ye dae without us?" he demanded. "Glesca's the backbane o' Scotland. Yon's a fine place, lass. A' the money's there. Yon's the best place in Scotland. There's nae auld fortress in it, maybe, but there's the new fortresses of strength an' will an' power. Remember that next time ye're speirin' about it."

She regarded him gravely, manifestly impressed.

"Is it bigger nor Strachur?"

He threw back his head again and roared. "Strachur? Bigger nor wee Strachur?" Then he became more solemn. "Dinna they teach ye geography at the schule, lassie? I'm sure," and he smiled as if it were a fresh joke, "that they've been needin' a teacher like me for a lang while, if that's a' ye ken about your ain country."

Remembrance flashed across her all at once, fragments of gossip at the school, of talk of a new teacher, of the assistant who was coming.

Panic seized her. This was the new teacher—and she had flung away her books! She had told him defiantly she had done so. He would read her name in them, written in that childish unformed hand. There came back memory of the words she had said to him, that she would never go to school again, never, *never!*—Had someone told him and had he come after her? She glanced about for some means of escape. In another moment her long legs would have been taking the field, but he put one hand on her shoulder. He had a way of demanding rather than asking.

"If ye'll show me the short cut to Bald Gourie I'll be off," he said. "I maun be back in Strachur the night."

She went silently with him across the field. He had spoken never a word, but without doubt he had been sent by the old schoolmaster to watch her. He would tell also that she had slapped wee Macphairson's freckled face. Horrors of punishment danced before her eyes, her mother's loud, angry voice, her father's

gentle "Weel, weel," and his sigh that hurt her far more than all her mother's words or thrashings.

She would be beaten, of course, when she went in. That was certain. As she climbed the hill, Sandy breasting it with his face lifted to the wind and drawing in deep delicious breaths of its freshness and savour, Eltrym knew that this time the "licking" would be worse than any she had ever received before.

For she had openly defied her mother, in that hour of rage and disillusionment. Now she felt little and cold. She shivered as she drew her cloak about her. She had never been a coward, but after the emotions of the day, she felt physically sick at the mere thought of return to the house.

She had a wild impulse to cry out to the innocent Sandy to have pity on her, to go back where he came from, to beg him not to tell. But something in her said, albeit drearily:

"What will be, will be. I've got to face it. I've got to face it."

At the brow of the hill, with the gleams of parting day behind her despairing person, she pointed to the house far below. Beyond it the water flashed and sparkled in the last of the sunlight. The fields spread before him, barren and bleak. The winds blew by him fresh and clean. Sandy regarded it critically.

"Ay, but it's healthy," he said with enthusiasm. "It's just the place. I could ask for naething better. But I could ha' ta'en a shorter road tae it, I'm thinkin'."

He plunged down the hill towards the farm, looking back after an instant expecting to see the daughter of Bald Gourie following. She sat, already remote and aloof, perched on one of the boulders, her face turned to the glory of the sunset. He called out gaily, "Are ye no comin', lassie?" She thought his gaiety an added cruelty. It was as if he wanted her to stand by while the story of her misdoings was recited, as if he looked forward with the utmost satisfaction to the just punishment of a transgressor.

She answered him loftily, though her heart was

pounding: "I hae the sheep tae fauld," and she turned her face away again to the radiance of the sunset. That at least could not be taken from her.

"Funny bairn," he muttered to himself as he went down the hill, "and deadly scared and unhappy over something—sullen lassie but no ill-looking in a way——" And so Sandy went on, glorying in the sheer loneliness and desolation of the prospect.

He thought of Glasgow and his Paisley home, the row of houses built all alike, the thronged trams and the bustle of trade, the general air of prosperity. "No Strachur lodging for me, if I can help it," he said. "I'll no be shut up in a valley while there's hills to breathe in." And he drew in deep draughts of the caller exhilarating air and squared his broad shoulders as he went swinging down the narrow sheep-track.

And on the hillside as the sun sank Eltrym rose and began to drive the sheep slowly to the lower pasture, the dog barking and circling round, the sheep bleating. She took a long while to fold them that night, lingering as late as she could, but at last she had finished, and leaned against the bars. She looked a small and rather forlorn figure, as she stood there. The lamps were being lit in the house. The kitchen window flung its square of yellow light across the cobbled yard. The old dog drowsed at her feet.

She waited, half expecting a shrill call at any moment. The schoolmaster was still indoors. It seemed a long while ere the front door clicked, a genial voice called out "Good night," and steps echoed on the path towards the road by the loch. He had taken his leave at last.

Then the kitchen door was unfastened, and Leezie stood silhouetted at the threshold. Her voice cut the half-darkness shrilly as she called.

Eltrym moved wearily towards the threatened hour of reckoning. Her feet felt as if weighted with lead. Her head and eyes ached with the aftermath of the day's rage and tears. Apathy fell again upon her, a dull resignation to whatever might happen. Only one thing

was sure, if they broke every bone in her body she would not go to school.

The wide passage was fully lit. Light shone, too, from the scarcely opened best room, and in it Mistress Hardie's raucous voice was heard strangely triumphant.

Eltrym dragged herself towards it. At first sight the room seemed crowded with shelves of books, with antimacassars, horsehair furniture and wool flowers in glass cases. Mistress Hardie stood by the table, which displayed the remains of a generous tea. The big Bible, which usually held the place of honour in the centre, was for the nonce pushed aside. Mistress Hardie, in a spotless blouse, her hair brushed freshly and primly back from her flushed face, turned and looked at her daughter, standing so white and silent in the doorway.

Perhaps something in the small chilled face touched the woman's heart-strings. Hers had been a hard, busy life of late. Bald Gourie and all it had once meant had been tottering for years. She had fought with all her might against that fact. Life was too crowded for hearts to have time to open one to the other, and Mistress Hardie was ever a woman who disdained to betray emotion or affection. She would have considered it a sign of weakness of character to rule otherwise than with a rod of iron. The shadow on Bald Gourie had hardened her heart and embittered her tongue.

But she spoke less sharply than usual now. The triumphant something in her voice was also in her eyes. She even smiled, and with the smile the worn mouth with its hard lines grew strangely pathetic.

"Come in, Eltrym. Don't stand there all night." And then, "Ye'll no need to gang to *that* schule," and more victoriously, "ye can tell the Macphairsons, should ye ever demean yersel' to speak wi' them, that ye're gettin' a private tutor o' your ain."

"A tutor?"

Mrs. Hardie nodded complacently. "Ay, an' a fine lad he is, too. He's to be assistant teacher down at Strachur, but it's here, at Bald Gourie, that he'll

bide. I kent his mither, puir thing. She's sair ill now."

She drifted into unusual reminiscence and shook her head once or twice. "An' before I kent wha he was I said to him that a' Strachur kent *I'd* no be takin' in boarders. But it's a different thing, seeing who he is. His mither was a fine wumman, puir soul, an' marriet a guid man. Weel, there's some hae trouble and some hae muckle luck."

Then her eyes glowered as if at all the Macphersons in the world. The shrill note came back to her voice :

"Anyhow, ye'll no be gangin' back to that schule to mix wi' *that* rubbish, as I've telt ye. Ye'll be receiving private tuition, as the McCrimmons used to do."

She nodded darkly towards the distant village on the Strachur road.

"Na, na, lass, ye'll no be mixing wi' that trash ony mair."

CHAPTER VI

SANDY AT BALD GOURIE

*He sits above the clang and dust of time,
He asks not converse nor companionship.*

WILLIAM WATSON.

So Alexander Mackinnon, junior, searching for lodgings such as in crowded, bustling Paisley he had often longed for, found what he sought in the secluded farmhouse on the hill, with quiet for study and concentration.

Sandy also had his dreams, though they were of a practical and strictly utilitarian order. They aimed at a school of his own one day, a nice tidy dwelling-house attached, and, in the background, a poultry-run. He had already picked out in his mind's eye a suitable housekeeper, a stout, amiable body, one of his father's many relatives.

There was his sister Christina. He would have liked Christina to have the position. She was a sensible woman, not over-young, and with a firm and righteous belief that, but for such fine stuff as the Mackinnons, Paisley, especially the religious side of Paisley, would long since have ceased to exist.

But of Christina more anon ! To Sandy Mrs. Hardie had generously allotted a capacious bed-sitting-room with numerous books, mostly in the Gaelic, and some of them very valuable.

The room looked sheer down to the loch, sparkling and rippling below his windows, and in their stated seasons *The Lord of the Isles* and other steamers and pleasure boats went sailing by, their paddles plainly audible in the stillness.

Sandy kept the windows wide open, and all the

sounds and smells of the farm came into the room, the fragrance of new-mown hay and burning leaves, the bleating of the sheep, and the barking of the old dog; sometimes, too, Leezie's idle laugh or foolish giggle, accentuated in the newcomer's hearing at first.

But Sandy's calm inquiring gaze, his frown, his curt manner soon altered that. He was a good young man, an Elder's son, and he had no time for the Leezies of the world.

The essential part of the agreement had been, from the very start, that Miss Eltrym McCrimmon Hardie was to be taught at home.

From his first glimpse of that glum young leddy he had been disposed to wish that she could have been left out of the bargain altogether.

But there it was, and he must teach her if he were to live at Bald Gourie. The McCrimmon pride still lingered in Mrs. Hardie. She offered hospitality and his lodging, but would accept no monetary recompense. In return, to salve his pride, he could teach her daughter. This arrangement, leaving Eltrym free for the hours Sandy was employed in Strachur, suited both Mrs. Hardie and himself perfectly.

There were two hours in the morning and two hours after school for Miss Hardie to receive instruction. It meant getting up earlier, but neither Eltrym, eager for instruction, nor Sandy, anxious faithfully to discharge his debt, cared about that.

The evenings were for Sandy and his pipe and books, either sacred to study or to an occasional special pupil or two in Strachur.

The plan suited Sandy's not too well-lined pocket as well. There was an ailing mother at home and a father with a limited income that had been stretched like elastic to its farthest limit to provide for the needs of a once large and ambitious family. Sandy was ambitious, too, but at present he had to devote his mind, and the remnants of his income, to the necessity of helping to keep going the newly acquired house at Paisley.

He was active and energetic, and on one or two

evenings went to Strachur again and held night school classes. He even taught several languages to the aspiring youth of Hell's Glen, for the Scot puts education before all else.

Mistress Hardie basked in the reflected glory of one who could speak, it seemed, every language under the sun; for whose tuition in spare hours the well-to-do folk about Strachur paid such good money. What time he had left to himself Sandy, when he was not playing football or golf or tennis, devoted enthusiastically to cycling around the neighbourhood.

"The way he stares at the sun settin' ower the loch," said Leezie, her goggle eyes wide; "as if you couldn't be seeing it every day! I canna tell ony difference masel', between ae day and anither."

She waited on him in giggling adoration, his very sternness and unapproachableness completing her subjection. His dictatorial manner, amazingly at variance with his youth, drew instant obedience.

As befitted one who kept "a real tutor" in the house, Mistress Hardie relaxed some of her hardworking efforts and kept another servant. She found that it gave her a new task to keep Leezie and the new girl from gossiping together. She drove them before her like a couple of clacking geese. Incidentally it also provided thae Macphairsons with a topic of burning interest. So, when Sandy came up the steep path after school, trundling his cycle, the peace of work nearing completion rested on the house. The old white-washed room, with its brown oaken rafters, its sunshine in the summer and its roaring fire in the winter, was to him the most comfortable place in the whole district. He shut the door at night, and, with his books and his pipe, and the old sheep-dog at his feet, he was quite happy. In the morning he drew up the blinds to look out on the waters of Loch Fyne, the sweeping fields, and the gaunt hills.

He was unco' stern for one so young, perhaps, but Mackinnon had begun life in a household sterner in some ways though quieter than Bald Gourie was. And when

he was seventeen, that age of ages for a lad, Sandy had had a love affair that had come to nothing. He thought that his heart was broken. Whatever Sandy Mackinnon felt he said not a word, but he had certainly changed and grown older and more self-contained. He steadily, almost deliberately, built a shell of reserve about himself on the "strong silent man" pattern.

Sometimes he came and sat by the kitchen settle and talked to Michael Hardie about Glasgow, and some of his old importance came back to that gentle, thowless ne'er-do-weel. He would talk in a hoarse whisper of Glesca days, and, with a wink of an eye, of Glesca conquests. He was aye the fascinating lad was this same Michael Hardie, according to his ain stories, and had been a fine braw man in his time.

But when Mistress Hardie bustled about he talked instantly of Bald Gourie, the sheep and the cattle, Strachur and Inveraray, for the guid wife directed a sharp tongue at Michael if he harked back to days before he climbed the Highland hills.

"Ay, a fine place, Glesca," she would say to Sandy. "I ken that. But it's nae the auld Scots place it used to be. Na, na! I'm telt that the Irish hae fair swamped Glesca, and that ye canna hear the guid auld Scots tongue since their invasion."

And Michael would wink one eye solemnly at Sandy, and Sandy, smoking his pipe, would wink back, and on the other side of the hearth Eltrym, busy spinning the thread for Harris tweed, would lift her head, conscious of understanding between them, and look at them both. Sometimes a smile flickered across the face that had grown so grave.

It seemed to her that the lilt of unspoken laughter rang in the room, that for all their solemnity of expression these two chuckled together inwardly, and each knew the other's thought. Her heart warmed towards Sandy because of this interest in her father. It kept him at home as well. Perhaps in the beginning, because of the liking he had for the shiftless man, Sandy took renewed interest in the education of the young daughter

of the house. He grew to recognise her moods, even if he did not altogether understand them, and became more tolerant of the surprising changes that came over her, the volatile temperament that had been so strictly repressed.

Often, outside, he saw Michael and his daughter laughing together, teasing each other, but in the house, under the heavy and misguided hand of the mistress, both went silently, grudgingly, about the place.

The days went on. Winter thundered in and stormed angrily out again. Spring went drifting past and scattered flowers even over the barest places. Summer and the big boats went sailing down Loch Fyne together, and laughing voices, mingled with the throb of the engines, floated up to the farm-house. Old dreams out of the grave where the child had buried them stirred again in the heart of the girl who was striving to forget.

Eltrym lifted her head one day from her lessons. Two years had made a change in her. She was learning languages now, speaking French uncommonly well and prettily. She was at the stage of girlhood bordering womanhood, a girlhood of budding grace of body, and yet withal of awkwardness of movement. But she was far too slender.

"Ye must not stoop like that," Sandy had said to her once sharply. He still spoke to her as if she were a schoolgirl. "Pull your shoulders together, Eltrym Hardie. Do you want to look like an old woman before your time?"

She had lifted her head, the yellow head, and looked at him, a strange light in her eyes. It was not resentment at Sandy's manner. She thought she had got used to that.

She said: "What does it matter what I look like—whether I appear an old woman or not?"

The laughter and music from a steamer drifted into the room as she spoke.

Sandy put down his pipe in amaze.

"Don't you care what you look like?"

She shook her head.

"I do not."

He examined the room as if for a solution.

"D'ye mean to say that is so? Do you intend to live all your days here? You'll surely be going out in the world as a teacher?"

Her face quivered.

"No," she said, and her firm chin tilted defiantly. The Highland temperament, with its bent towards "second sight," baffled Sandy.

"But do you mean to stay here all your life?"

She turned her face towards the loch. Through the open window a butterfly fluttered in, preened itself on the ledge for a moment and then flew out again.

"I think I shall stay," she said very low. Her eyes followed the butterfly wheeling out into the sunlight. How brief its little hour of life, how short a time until the fall of the leaf and butterflies vanished! It would die, in a day of sudden chill, or be beaten to the earth bruised and broken. A stab of pain came to her heart because of something never, apparently, to be forgotten.

"Ye hae no ambition, then," Sandy answered quietly but with a touch of scorn, "no dreams of the future?"

She shivered.

"Do dreams ever come true, Sandy?" she asked sadly.

He glanced at the young profile turned towards the window. It came to him that she had grown older. He stared at her as if seeing her for the first time.

"Once," she said breathlessly, hurrying her words as if anxious to be over and done with them, "once I wanted to go away, far away, never to come to Bald Gourie any more. The roads called me. I used to hear voices along them, and they spoke of the cities of the world, of wonderful places. The roads ran on out into the world, calling me to follow——"

And then suddenly she caught her breath and stopped. She turned to Sandy as if startled at herself. Her hands trembled.

"An' do ye not hear the voices now?" asked Sandy very gently.

She looked at him, her eyes dark, haunted. Words came with a rush :

"I'll not hear them again. I'm not wanting to hear them again. I shut my eyes so that I may not see. I shut my ears that I may not listen."

Then she rose and left the room. He waited, but she did not come back.

Sandy knocked the ashes out of his pipe thoughtfully. He was thinking of something he had heard, something he had paid small heed to at the time. What was it? Oh, it was about another daughter of this house who had died. The voice came back now, not mischievous, just complacently gossiping.

"Ou ay, ye are up at Bald Gourie! Ay, ye're verra lucky, for Mistress Hardie will look efter ye weel. There's nane can beat her for bannocks and cakes in a' the neighbourhood, they say. But, man, yon's the woman wi' the tongue. Of coorse, ye hae heard that she gangs naewhere except tae the market? I'm thinkin' she'll be shuttin' her young dochter up as if in prison. A pretty little thing her ither puir lass was. She could ha' done weel for hersel' here, but she was aye high and mighty. There was naething in Strachur guid eneuch for her. That auld gowk, Michael Hardie, wi' his talk o' this an' havers o' that, bred nonsense in the young heid. Bald Gourie's a proud hoose, but it has naething to be so proud ower, when ye come to think o't."

"Poor little lass!" Sandy said aloud. The child's eyes as she left the room haunted him. He felt as if he could ask her to confide in him, to reason this thing out with her, to point out to her that her own life must not be shadowed or overcast by the act of another.

But Sandy could not speak of these things, now or even later in life. He had his limitations, and this reserve in his nature, as well as outside himself, was a thing he had never striven to subdue. Rather had he tried to cultivate it. Afterwards, years afterwards, he strove to mend, but then it was too late. He had to be

dragged down Calvary's hill, to be tortured at every step of the road, before he knew.

But these things were mercifully hid from him as he smoked in contemplative silence in that long white-walled room with its bookshelves and its ugly antimacassars.

Eltrym did not come back to finish her lessons. Where she had gone he did not know. There was no sound of her in the house as he went out.

But next morning, at the two-hours lesson snatched before he left for the school at Strachur, Sandy had given the girl a small volume of verse by William Ernest Henley, to her a new name.

"We shall take a course of poetry," he said to her in the grave, old manner that sat so oddly on his boyish face.

Eltrym said nothing but her lip quivered slightly. She might have spoken of the hoarded reams of verse in the attic, but she refrained. She, too, had unexpected and often unsuspected reserves of thought and speech.

When he had gone she took up the book. It opened of itself at one page, as if by intention :

"It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll,
I am the master of my Fate,
I am the captain of my soul."

Surging into her mind with all the force of an on-rushing wave, the words swept away the bitter debris of the years, the dead weeds of bitterness which had grown and grown with long hours of brooding, of striving to understand, and which at last had seemed to clog the wheels of her mind so that they revolved wearily and slowly.

There was in her disposition, after all, much that tended to make her silent and dour and sad, and so Sandy found when he came back and watched her intent face, bent over the book.

For the moment he knew that for her Bald Gourie farm had ceased to exist and the shadow on the house that fell also across that young heart had lifted for a space.

The wave as it came tumbling back on itself would sweep away again, but at least it had brought something with it. At least it would bear something sad and soul-clogging away.

For Eltrym Sandy had the feeling of a father for a child, a sense of tolerance and indulgence for her inexperience of things, and due allowance for the effect of knowledge that had come like a sudden storm into her life. "But it has bent and not broken her," said Sandy. In his thoughts she was like a young slim fir, inclined from its place and prematurely bowed, but the roots still held tenaciously. There would be spring again and sunlight as well as shadow. Because life had been limited for Sandy also, he knew, although a trifle vaguely, what books would be helpful to Eltrym Hardie in that lonely house in her dark hours.

This was only one of the books that Sandy was to lend her. He chose them carefully, of course, chose them at times more for a child of fourteen than one in reality already passing into womanhood.

And sometimes to a small audience of one, all eyes that twinkled like stars, Sandy Mackinnon lectured—because with Sandy somehow all discussions developed naturally into lectures.

Often when Eltrym Hardie, far away from Bald Gourie and farther still from Sandy Mackinnon, looked back she could see him very plainly, standing against the oak mantel, his hands in his pockets, his head thrown back, his dark head with its ruffled curls, and his voice, so grave and old for one of his age—he was then about twenty-three—filling the room. Sometimes he recited, and he recited well, and the listening girl found the voices of the poets falling like gentle healing dew upon the parched desert of her heart. For that, in the years to come, she was ever grateful to Sandy Mackinnon.

Eltrym looked different at these times. Colour came into her face and the thin cheeks rounded. She walked no longer alone, but the dead and the living poets went with her, singing over the hills and sighing up the glens.

Often Yeats with his exquisite lyrics walked by her and sat with her on the grey rocks and sang his haunting, unforgettable songs, and made music of the stones and the grasses of Loch Fyne, ay, even of the old hut and the roads of the dour Body ower the hill. Yeats showed her beauty in everything.

Sandy had not been so sure of Yeats in his discussion on the poets, but Eltrym had explained him for herself. She had known what Yeats meant, somehow, when he walked on an Irish hill alone, and she sat as one far off and listened to the words that came to her, drifting by on the wind, over the hill, over the water, and all around her "evening full of the linnets' wings."

In her low sweet voice she had read aloud to Sandy :

"When you are old and grey and full of sleep
And, nodding by the fire, take down this book
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep ;

"How many loved your moments of glad grace
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face,—

"And, bending down beside the glowing bars
Murmured a little sadly, how love fled
And passed upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars."

"Ay, but it's a wee bit above most folk," said Sandy. And she had loved "the man who had dreamed of Fairyland," though Sandy had been more dubious about that than anything else.

It was not common sense, he declared. "It's no

practical ava. Now, the Scottish poets—I'm no saying, mind you, that he isn't a fine writer. But there are others. Take Thomas Hardy."

With the iconoclastic force of youth she had swept Hardy aside. She heaped scorn on him in the face of his admiring critic.

"He has never appealed to me. I canna see what ye find in him to rave about. Take for instance, 'The Temporary the All.' I canna even understand him at times."

"Ay, that's why," said Sandy solemnly, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "But he's written more than that, I'd have ye ken."

Her shoulders in their faded blue linen wrap gave an angry shrug. "I don't care. I don't want to read another thing he has written. It's like a surfeit of plum pudding——"

"Plum pudding," said Sandy, "is a satisfying meal for ony sensible man. I ken weel," he added wittingly, "that ye're a' for these Irish poets."

She flared up at once, the colour high in her cheeks. "An' what for no?" she cried. "I'm half Irish."

"I ken fine that there's but a wee bittie Scot in ye, lassie. I'm dootin' whether so little be for your guid," he added critically; "ye need balance, ye see."

She was furious with him and her heart stormed silently, but she went back to her beloved poets and ignored Sandy's criticism.

"There's Newbolt. I love *him*, so you can't say I'm biased, and William Watson and Arthur Symons. Why, is there anything mair exquisite in the world than Symons's 'Loom of Dreams'?"

She began softly to recite it:

"For what is the world but what it seems?
And who knows but that God, beyond our guess,
Sits weaving worlds out of loneliness?"

She added triumphantly, "There! Your Hardy man could not have written that!"

Sandy was shocked at this continued aggressiveness. She was young and ignorant, of course, this pupil of his, she could not know that Thomas Hardy was a name to conjure with. But there it was, the Irish drop of blood in her again, the "agin the Government" attitude.

"Come, noo; what dae ye think o' that?"

He was cautious: "I have told ye not to speak so broadly, to acquire the English accent. As for the poem, well, I'm not approving of that last verse at all."

He was the son of an Elder of the Kirk and therefore could not be expected to. Those three lines with their heretical questioning, their expressed doubt of the established order of things, were against all his rigid Sabbatarian principles. It was rank blasphemy to one who had a sternly Scriptural, not to say Calvinistic, upbringing. He set his lips in grim disapproval.

Eltrym rose because of a clatter of pots and pans in the kitchen, and of a call that denoted firmly that tea was ready, but she turned back mischievously on the threshold and in a swift change of mood sang or half chanted mockingly to Sandy in an exaggerated Irish brogue:

"Loughareema! Loughareema!
Stars come out and stars are hiding,
The water whispers on the stones,
The flittherin' moths are free."

She laughed ever so softly lest her mother should hear and waved her hand to him gaily. Sandy refused to be beguiled.

Eltrym gurgled happily. "He's a dour man, the tutor," she observed to the ceiling.

She shut the door, opened it as swiftly and peeped in at him, her blue dress against the dark oak, her yellow head shining.

"Will you have a glass o' buttermilk for your tea to-day, Mr. Mackinnon?" she speired demurely.

Sandy nodded. He was setting the books solemnly in place, for after tea there would be another lesson. He did not turn round. He heard her go down the

curious winding stairs; she was quite happy now. He had noticed the brightness of mood when she had been reading poetry. He did not realise then that, to her, poets were friends who sat and talked with her, laughed and cried with her, that they had given her a new world and new hope. She would be happy, maybe, until the door of the kitchen opened, when a bustling atmosphere and sharp words directed at Leezie, or herself, or both, acted like a cold douche. Then avaunt dreams for the practical things of everyday life!

Sandy went to the window and looked out, his thoughts already in Glasgow. He had a letter in his pocket; he had read it once and dared not read it again. His mother was very ill, the wee mother that one could gather up in one's arms like a baby. Sandy had often carried her in his strong young arms upstairs to her room. She had been ill for five months now and Christina, his elder sister, had written.

The letter was as straightforward and uncompromising as Christina herself, and as brief as her speech. "And the doctor says she will not get better. We must make up our minds to it. It might come any day."

All Sandy's spare money had gone to make the mother comfortable. He had scrimped and saved, had done without things often necessary; and now he could not speak of it to anyone. He just stared out of the window and saw the reserved lonely house that was to be still lonelier.

He did not hear Eltrym as she entered carrying an old carved wooden tray that was almost too heavy for her. It was one of her duties to set Sandy's table, and now she covered its round mahogany top with a worn but clean cloth of embroidered linen, set the blue delf pieces in place, and a huge yellow teapot with grotesque flowers that had been taken out of its case and was sacred to the uses of "the tutor" only. There was a loaf of brown bread, a generous yellow square of butter, and fresh hot scones. She added the touch of some pink wild roses, fragrant and delicate, which she had gathered early that morning.

She went out lightly as she came, and in the kitchen downstairs waited for the kettle to bubble and sing. She wondered whether Sandy's silence was because of the breeze over the wondrous Hardy and her neglect of the Scots poets. A thrill of compunction passed through her when she came back and found him still standing there.

"Sandy," she said softly. She stood waiting by the table, her eyes wistful. She had put a white pinafore over her blue frock and it made her look very young and childlike.

"Sandy," she called twice ere he heard, and when he turned with a start she was struck by the misery on his weather-browned face. She said involuntarily :

"Is onything wrang? "

But Sandy's face had donned its stern silent mask again. He shook his head, shut the door on his holy of holies and made no sign of the suffering and fear that were wringing his heart.

He sat down at the table and spoke over his shoulder brusquely :

"Ye've forgotten the jam."

CHAPTER VII

THE BEND OF THE ROAD

*She walks—the lady of my delight—
A shepherdess of sheep.
Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white.
She guards them from the steep.*

ALICE MEYNELL.

PERHAPS from that day grew up the sense of motherly interest that Eltrym evinced in the silent young-old Mackinnon. Sandy would have squared his broad shoulders and tossed back his curly mane had anyone suggested mothering and pitying *him*. He would have ridiculed the very idea, have fiercely combated it.

His first love-affair had gone wrong and he would have no more to do wi' women. The lassies at Strachur nodded their shawled heads and flirted their bright eyes at him in vain.

Unknown to himself, Sandy had taken the departure of love more deeply than the actual boy-and-girl "affair" that had preceded it. The vanity of youth had been hurt rather than his heart. But he had chosen to think differently. Had he been asked to describe himself it would have been as one who now walked apart, one who had dedicated his life to bachelordom. When he was rich he would have rooms crowded with books and cosy chairs where friends would loll, and the folk who occupied these chairs should be of his own sex.

Sandy had said more than once to himself that he was done with women. He would not have been melodramatic enough to say his heart was broken; his common sense would have argued, anyway, that hearts do not break, but he would have admitted that it was "sore." Nevertheless, this healthy organ, despite

Sandy's belief that it had atrophied, could still thrill as of old at an athletic gathering, at all sport apparently, and especially at the ecstasy of the moment when, to the plaudits of a madly cheering crowd, he dashed safely through all the opposing "men" and, with the ball at his feet and his eye unerring, kicked a fine running goal!

He went to Glasgow every week-end now since Christina's letter had come. Before that he had taught on Saturday afternoons and saved the fare for some comfort for the gentle mother who was slipping so quietly out of life. He never spoke of her even to Mistress Hardie, who had known her as a girl. But he grew visibly thinner, and always hurried up even the steep slope to the house as if expecting somebody or something, a letter or telegram that had by some chance come there instead of to Strachur school.

And then one day he told Mistress Hardie that he had applied for an assistantship at a school nearer his home. He had been offered an appointment. It was then for the first time, perhaps to stop the chorus of protests and exclamations, that he had mentioned his mother's illness. Mrs. Hardie had just nodded her head. She had known all along, she said, and made no further demur.

So Sandy was going from Bald Gourie.

To Eltrym the news made little or no difference at first. She knew that schooldays must soon end, that Sandy one day would have to go. She would miss him, she told him sadly. And Sandy, stooping over his packing, his coat off, and his shirt-sleeves rolled up to the elbows, said gruffly, and speaking in Scots because he was more moved than he cared to admit:

"Ay, an' I'll miss you, too. I hope you'll gang on wi' your French. You're no sae bad at it."

This from Sandy was praise indeed.

She lingered by the door, watching him as he packed his few shirts, cheap but clean, his worn hair-brushes and his much-darned socks, once of a gay and fashionable tint, but now faded with the frequent ablutions

of soap and water and the unfailing attention of every sort of weather.

The socks were so darned that little of the original yarn remained. They stirred something in her, wistful and maternal. She wanted to put her arms about Sandy, as if he were a lone lad who needed comforting, and Sandy looking up saw her eyes then as if for the first time. They were beautiful eyes, darkly grey, and there was the shimmer of tears in them. Eltrym herself, nearly eighteen, looked older in the new linen dress which she wore for the first time, and which the mother had decreed must from now on reach to the ankles.

She looked quaintly older in it, this old-fashioned, ill-fitting confection that Mistress Hardie had made with her own hands, its prim belt confining a waist whose symmetry owed nothing to art. The white lace at the neck formed a primly designed collar, and out of the ill-cut gown, despite its ugliness, her throat rose white and beautiful, a slim white stalk on which the delicate flower of her face was set.

If Sandy had voiced his sentiments at that moment he would have exclaimed, "Why, you're beautiful!" But Sandy was, as we have seen, not given to exclamations. He only said, in his precise English, "And you must keep up your lessons as if I were here. Mind that! There's no need to let them slide. It's a pity your mother will not let you become a pupil teacher at Inveraray. It would be a beginning, anyway."

"I shall never be a school-teacher anywhere, Sandy Mackinnon."

"And why not?" He stopped packing indignantly, nettled at her tone.

She shook her head, her yellow head with its tangle of hair that neither curled nor was straight but just stopped provocatively short of being either.

"Maybe," said Sandy with some sarcasm, "ye think there's greater glory in minding sheep a' your life?"

Eltrym ignored this clumsy thrust.

"I'm going to London," she declared loftily.

"London!" said Sandy in a tone that indeed befitted the son of an Elder. "*London!*" Then he added sarcastically: "Isn't Glesca—or maybe Dublin—good enough for ye?"

She shook her head again. He did not know that Glesca was not far enough away for her to forget Jeanie. He only saw her face, still so absurdly childlike, go pale, the lips sad and set.

"If ever I leave Bald Gourie I will go to London. Sometimes at night I think o' a' its lamps, shining like the stars, and its great buildings lifting themselves up against the sky—London, where 'at dusk grim buildings turn to palaces in Fleet Street and the Strand'—you know the poem, Sandy."

Sandy stared at her in frank amazement. "Ye're talkin' nonsense," he said, and she started as if his voice had reached her from afar and dragged her out of some distant country whither she had gone.

"What would ye be wantin' to see Fleet Street and the Strand for?" asked Sandy. "It's only for editors and journalists and chaps of that ilk. *London!* Of course there's no accounting for tastes. London's all very well for a visit, but ye must have your pocket well lined with gold even for that. It's a mighty big, cruel place at times—what would ye be doing in London? Why——"

And then he looked at Eltrym, ignorant Eltrym, standing there, with her pale dreaming face, and her shining eyes looking not at him but over his head and out of the window, and over Loch Fyne, still dreaming of a marvellous city. He wanted to laugh at this silly creature thinking of facing life in London, but instead something came and like a magical finger touched his heart. It was half pain, half ecstasy.

This delicate maiden, like a butterfly poised for flight, how could one imagine *her* fighting or struggling for existence? A longing, sudden and fierce and inexplicable, surged over him, to throw his arms about her and shield her from every harm. He thrilled all over and suddenly stooped down to his

battered trunk again. His heart hammered so he could not find words to speak.

Eltrym went away and thought him hard and strangely unsympathetic. She departed to fold the sheep, dreaming of London as she retired. She had spoken of it aloud, and, once spoken, desire had leaped into determination. The confidence of youth saw no barriers.

Only yesterday she had spoken to Sandy about Cecil Anderson, the son of the "Body ower the hill."

"Ay. His father's dead and he has gone to London. He's running a paper or a magazine there, I hear. And the place at Hell's Glen is i' the market. Not that anybody will be anxious to buy a place like that, wi' naething behind it."

She had hesitated about asking Sandy anything farther. Something in her shyly shrank from questioning, but now she wondered whether she could ever go to London, whether he, Cecil, would remember and redeem his promise to a child.

She sighed: "I was only a wee bit lassie then. He'll no be remembering."

Returned to his own quarters Sandy left his packing for a while and began to pace up and down the room. He went to the window and saw, far off against the hill, Eltrym's figure slowly climbing, the blue dress fluttering, the old yellow dog following, and she would be dreaming of London. He had a mind to follow her.

"Silly little thing!" he said to himself, and then he smiled the rare smile that lit up his face at times. "Silly little thing!" But something tender and deep crept into the words.

Perhaps he, too, began to dream, for under a stern countenance the Scotsman hides much more sentiment than the world, apt to judge by exteriors only, gives him credit for. How strange that he had not noticed how quickly she had grown, that she was no longer a child, but someone who had wound her way into his heart, so that he could never shut her out again!

Then Sandy shook his mane of hair and banished these foolish thoughts. He was going away from Bald Gourie and it might be that he should never come there again. His duty was at home, to give his spare time to that ailing mother. He was going away, and, after all, it was well that it was so, if sentiment were bent on swaying him like this. It would be very easy to care more than he should for Eltrym Hardie. The confession, hidden and unexpressed, was significant, though he shook his head and squared his shoulders to convince himself that at present he did not care.

But something in him said very clearly, "Have you ever thought how empty life will be when Eltrym has gone completely out of it? Have you ever thought how often in fancy, if not in reality, you will come back to this old house?"

And something else in him, the son of an Elder of the Kirk, said also very sternly :

"Are ye forgetting who she is? That she's a Hardie o' Bald Gourie? Are ye no forgettin' the shadow on this house? The gossip o' the neighbours? Are ye forgetting that the Mackinnons are poor but intensely proud?"

Sandy turned uneasily from the window. The whispering tongues followed him as they had followed Eltrym.

"Ay, ane o' the Hardies o' Bald Gourie. What was that now about ane o' thae Hardies?"

He shrugged impulsively. "Oh, well, I'm going back to Glesca. And some day Eltrym will marry someone here, one of these very Macphersons, perhaps."

And then at that something in him cried out, drowning the voices of all the Elders in Scotland, and said to him passionately and clearly :

"No, no!" and again, "No, no! The truth is that you love her, that you have loved her for a long while without knowing it. But you know it now."

Then he thought of the scandal that still clung to Bald Gourie, as scandals do in lonely out-of-the-way places and villages, to be handed down maybe to

another generation. There had been a daughter of that house, a daughter of "proud Buntty McCrimmon who had married Michael Hardie," who had "gane wrang."

If it had been a smaller croft, or a but-and-ben, it would not have mattered so much. But the pride o' the McCrimmons by Loch Fyne had too long been the talk of the countryside to be easily forgotten or forgiven.

"That auld hoose stickin' up there on the tap o' the hill" still presented its proud, gloomy front to the world that went by on the road beneath, though the lands had lessened and servants had long been hard to come by.

His father, an Elder of the Kirk and a proud man, too, would have heard the story. He was a proud man, indeed, was Mackinnon, senior, and it was extremely characteristic that to the last even his wife spoke of him as Alexander.

But the thought of Eltrym flew back and clamoured at the long-closed doors of Sandy's heart and would not be denied admittance. His mind travelled slowly, pitting itself against his heart. He found himself unconsciously thinking what his father's thoughts would be.

It was a fine old place, Bald Gourie, for all its grimness, and it would come down to the last of the family, to Eltrym one day. Then he braced his shoulders against these thoughts. To give Sandy his due, whatever Eltrym might possess, it played but a very small part in his decision. It made the foundation more solid in his father's eyes, that was all. Sandy had been poor too long to be altogether blind to some of the advantages of comfort, however.

Slowly and methodically he resumed his packing, and, as he worked, he stacked his thoughts and plans, put them into the pigeon-holes of his brain, as it were, as if for future reference. Then he saw Eltrym, coming back over the hillside again, and all these wise thoughts and warnings fled.

He went down into the big whitewashed kitchen with the sun dancing on its clean, freshly scrubbed floor,

odorous of yellow soap and water, and he spoke straightforwardly to Mrs. Hardie who, in her clean, cool afternoon gown, the sleeves rolled up to the elbow, because of the duties she was always finding to do, was baking cakes.

The flames played across the room and lit up her hot flushed face. She stood still, her hands in the bowl of flour, and stared at him as if she could not believe him while he spoke. Fear had come into her eyes at first as if she did not understand, and then suddenly her poor mouth fell agape and quivered in the most piteous manner. She sat down a-tremble and put her hard-working hands, still with the dough clinging to them, about her face. The white of the flour powdered her prematurely grey hair. Her head bowed to the level of the table and great sobs shook her.

Sandy suddenly felt that he had blundered into the very inner sanctuary of this woman's life, saw with her eyes all its idols broken and desecrated—and then Mistress Hardie withdrew her hands from her face. It was calmer, though the mouth still worked piteously. Sandy looked away because he could not bear to let her know that he saw her distress.

Her bosom heaved and then she spoke in a voice that sounded hoarse.

"I'll speak tae Mr. Hardie aboot it, Sandy," she said. "I'll no stand in onyone's way. If Eltrym wishes it, but she's young yet, Sandy——"

"I know; I have said nothing to her."

She hesitated, then rose, her figure taut.

"But, mebbe, there's something that ye don't know." She breathed heavily now. The words were hard to come by. But she was Scottish and straight and this thing had to be said. A swift spasm passed over her lined face.

"I had another dochter——" She could say no more just then.

Sandy lifted his hand for her to stop. His voice was unusually gentle. He, too, was very Scottish in that moment.

"Let the deid rest!" he said solemnly. "We'll no' disturb them."

She hid her face in her hands when Sandy had gone. She did not cry. It seemed as if her eyes had shed their last tears years ago.

In the lonely kitchen, where the only sounds were the ticking of the grandfather clock and the crackling of the logs on the fire, a voice prayed aloud slowly and earnestly.

And across the sun-dappled fields Sandy Mackinnon went to meet Eltrym, his broad shoulders thrown back, his head high in defiance of a world, small indeed, but very near and real to him.

Eltrym's back was towards him. Her blue skirts fluttered about her slim ankles, and in the light her hair shone like ripe corn. All around her the land stretched away with soft hazy mist in the hollows. The yellow sheep-dog beside her gave a sharp yap of recognition.

Eltrym did not hear. She was looking at the white Loch Fyne road, winding far below. Her eyes followed it to where the hill thrust out its sharp shoulder and hid the turning from sight. Her eyes were full of unshed tears. For the first time for many a day she had allowed herself to think of Jeanie. And Jeanie had come to her, walked with her, spoken of things long forgotten.

"The bend o' the road," whispered Jeanie's voice. "It is out of sight. But it goes on and on"—and something pleading and warming had come into her tones. They seemed so near that if she looked round she was sure she must see Jeanie in the warm afternoon sunshine. With a sobbing breath Eltrym turned—and, behold! there was Sandy striding across the short grass towards her.

And all at once the whispering voice was but as the wind, a thing of dreams, and Sandy—Sandy was reality. He was as one of the roads one's feet must follow.

CHAPTER VIII

FOR THE THIRD AND LAST TIME

*Your love is all so quiet
And solemn as the sea ;
Like an old song at evening
It comforts me.*

JOHN McLURE.

FOR the third and last time, a year afterwards, they were calling the banns of Eltrym Hardie and Alexander Mackinnon, in the old church of the lochside village where the banns and funeral notices of many a McCrimmon had been formally said. The seats where they had been wont to sit had been vacant this many a day. The last of their name had not been there since that wind-swept afternoon, years ago now, when out in the churchyard the rain spattered down on the old minister as, in a quavering voice, he committed the body of Jeanie Agnes to the dust whereof it was made.

Now had the brethren gathered together for a more joyous occasion. The kirk was packed as on that Sunday when the news first ran through the surrounding villages that the banns of Eltrym Hardie and Sandy the new schulemaister were nailed to the weather-beaten door.

Now in the churchyard, where to-day the wind went whispering ever so softly, the villagers gathered in knots, and many curious faces watched the road from Bald Gourie. There were many noddings and shakings of heads and placid foldings of shawls and kerchiefs.

"*She will be here the day. Weel, it will be guid tae see a weddin' i' the kirk ance mair. The McCrimmons were a' mairrit here. They would na be mairrit i' the hoose like ither folk.*"

And they talked again of the pride of those McCrimmons whose tombs leaned crazily, grey and old, in the sunlit grass around them.

"Ay, man, but the guid auld times are gane a'the-gither. They'll no be gaun to gie us the spread noo. Uh-ha! Aweel, hae ye seen the lassie? A wee bittie slip o' a lass, that yin—but, as I was sayin', there'll be nane o' the feastin' an' the pleasin'— I was speirin' Leezie aboot Mistress Hardie's gown. Yon lassie has mair gab than ony i' the place. Ay, but it's awfu' dainty; a' silk an' it can stand up by itself. It will be guid to see her sittin' i' her seat in the kirk again in a' her brows."

Through all the ordeal of these things—the muttered greetings, the gaze of half-kindly, half-inquisitive faces, some of them old and very familiar, gnarled and brown like wind-fallen apples—the mistress of Bald Gourie had passed. She looked neither to right nor left as she walked to the church door. Behind her a little sheepishly came her husband, and with him Eltrym in a soft grey gown befitting the summer day, and a large white hat which, on the authority of Leezie, who had lingered by the gate, had come all the way from Edinburgh, and therefore could not be equalled by anything Paris might ever hope to produce.

So, too, the black silk gown that Mistress Hardie wore right finely. It rustled like wind in the wheat. The plume on her bonnet nodded bravely. The bonnet itself glittered like the scales of snakes. The shawled villagers stared aghast at it. Nothing so grand had been seen for years, if ever. It had come frae Glesca, Leezie announced triumphantly. It was undoubtedly a concession to the bridegroom.

Now on the breathlessly silent congregation the quavering voice of the old minister rose and fell.

Mistress Hardie's stern face went a little white; maybe she was thinking of the time when *she* was married; maybe, of other things.

Eltrym sat by her, very pale, her gloved hands clutching tightly her Bible. She felt lonier than ever

she remembered, shut apart in a sense from all that went on around her. Even the minister's voice was a thing far away and unreal. It came faintly as from a tremendous distance.

On the other side of her father sat Sandy, his arms folded, his face set and stern in repose; she thought once incongruously how he looked like a critic who had come to judge the minister's performance. One could not tell by his face what he thought. He sat and stood and did the other things required of him. When they rose for the psalms he sang, for he had a fine if untrained voice and was proud of it.

Once only he turned and looked at Eltrym—and then all at once his over-stern young face relaxed and his rare smile flashed into his eyes and around the firm mouth. It was like unexpected sunshine in a grey place and, though it passed as swiftly as it came, it warmed the heart of the girl, thrilled her with a sense of his love and the strength of his very silence.

Sandy fixed his eyes on the minister once more, and after a while ventured to glance around.

The church was ancient indeed; the oaken bench on which he sat was pitted with the marks of age, and he saw at one end of it, as on the slabs at his feet, was carved some design that was strangely familiar. Then he remembered that on the old house at Bald Gourie, over its stone porch with the curious leaden-paned windows, was the remnant of this same design. Time had half obliterated nearly all but the head of the raging lion turned towards him and menacing, as now in the kirk.

He remembered the rage that had come over Mistress Hardie when once she spoke of the "Body ower the hill" who had built his fine new red mansion on the site of an older Bald Gourie. He had turned and looked at Eltrym again, had pondered the delicate lines of her still profile, the fine nose, the curve of the short upper lip. For a moment she was worlds remote from him, out of his reach. A sense of fear swept into his heart; then by him Michael Hardie coughed asthmatically and

wiped his mouth on a clean but coarse handkerchief. Sandy returned to realities with a jerk at the sight of that spotted handkerchief, which might be said to be an epitome of its owner's taste.

Sandy was back again in the world of everyday things, alive to the knowledge that intimation was now being solemnly made of his union with the daughter of a small croft-owner. His feet were on the head of the broken lion, carved deep in the stone, as he stood up.

Then they were going out of the church. Through the open door the sweet clear voices of the younger members of the congregation followed. The birds were chirping and carolling in the trees of the churchyard.

The blue arch of the sky bent over them. The sun shone on the flagged paths where the short green grass grew bravely in the cracks of the stones.

Eltrym walked by her mother's side. She was trembling a little now. In the old kirk something grave and disturbing had come to her, troubling her peace.

Was it the dead McCrimmons, whom it was said she so strongly resembled, who had cried to her from the very stones under her feet?

It had been so strange to sit there, to see in front of her that iron-grey slab with its worn carving, its ancient Gaelic inscription to another Eltrym, who had her dreams, too, maybe, ere they put the tablet in place and carved her name.

For a wild moment she felt she must run away from the very assurance that life was going to proffer her; from the shelter and the quiet and the surety of one man's love. A mavis sang in the trees and found its echo in her heart. She was like a wild bird that could not be tamed. Oh! better far to flutter away unfettered, to be free whatever happened. And then her mother turned and she saw her face, followed the gaze of those eyes, saw, too, what her mother was seeking. It was only one instant, and Mistress Hardie had gone down the path again as she had come, looking now neither to right nor left.

But Eltrym knew that she saw but one thing, a green mound, bare of flowers or stone, not far from the pathway. But the grass was kind, kind as the arms of God.

The folk said of Mistress Hardie afterwards, "Eh, but she's an awfu' hard woman, ye ken. Not a word here or a word there, but just gangin' oot wi' her auld heid i' the air, an' her bonnet noddin' and noddin'. It's a peety, considerin' a' things, the pride o' some folk. Aweel. But the young lass was gey near greetin'."

And again: "The lassie winna wear the schulemaister's breeks. My! he's awfu' stern, that yin."

And so Mistress Hardie and her plumed bonnet, the cynosure of all eyes, walked on and down to the gate without flinching. She did not look on either side of the flagged pathway; but something that is of us, unencased by the body, unfettered by the things of earth, and undeterred by the tongues of the censorious world, went out from Mistress Hardie and found its way among the green mounds and the toppling tombstones.

The woman went straight on, head high, proud and erect, to where the ancient carriage waited by the yett, but the invisible something, keening, knelt down and buried its face in the long grass.

Eltrym heard the voices if she did not hear the words, but they drove like flame through her body. They were as many pointing fingers. Had she turned she would have seen only kindly, well-wishing faces, heard blessings for one so young, so fragile and pretty. But she did not turn. She only knew that the wild thrush of her heart ceased struggling in the cage of its environment, that her dreams fell away from her.

Remembrance came, swift and keen and cruel as a sword. It said to her what she deemed the whispering voices of the villagers were saying. It stung her cheeks to flame.

And it was in that moment that the dour Body's son drove by, the horses' heads tossing, the harness bright in the blaze of the morning sunshine.

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He touched his hat to a group of villagers. His hair was not so fair now as when he came wandering over the fields on a stormy day years ago; it was brushed back in the stiff fashion so many Londoners affect. His face was older and graver, but as he saw the group by the gate it suddenly lit up, as if in recognition and surprise.

Eltrym Hardie was coming through the gate in her soft grey dress and the big hat under which her hair shone like pale gold. They were so near that as he turned their eyes met.

He had thought at first "A deuced pretty girl," and then, "Why, if it isn't the little girl who made songs, the little girl grown up."

For a second impulse had bade him stay, then the thought of the boldness of such a procedure and the embarrassment of staring and curious villagers deterred.

Besides, there was Mistress Hardie, surely, that severe lady in creaking silk and the warlike bonnet, who seemed to snort scorn as she looked at him. He remembered what his father had told him about the only interview he had ever had with that dominating lady.

Decidedly it was not the time or place to stop and ask that astonishing vision whether she still wrote songs! He smiled at the very thought of the scandal such a question at the church gate would cause.

Besides there were other reasons—and he sighed a little then.

So he drove on, his spanking horses raising the dust, and once he thought he would perhaps make time to-morrow, out of this brief visit, to walk across the fields and, if he saw her, ask about the verses.

He would be quite justified in doing that. Was he not a go-a-head and enterprising publisher? Here might be a literary "find." Who knew?

Then he laughed at himself. He had been recalling the bare-footed lass with her ragged red shawl who had sullenly recited the verses about the hill and the roads

and Loch Fyne; and now he was thinking of the ultra-fashionably dressed girl at the kirk gate. What a difference!

"If she writes at all now"—and he shrugged his shoulders, for he deemed he had come to a cynical and *blasé* age—"it will probably be an ode to a powder-puff."

And so he left it at that.

That night Eltrym, who earlier in the day had told herself primly that dreams and she must for ever part company, was haunted and pursued by them.

When she went to bed she could not sleep. The night dragged by, endless, interminable. The wind had risen, and the crazy fastenings of the shutters rattled. Loose boards creaked as if under ghostly footsteps. The blinds flapped eerily against the window.

Towards the restless dawn there came a last flickering of the fire of old desires, the calling of far roads, the lure of other ways than those Fate had destined for her.

What had her life been? What had life given her? Just a series of empty, almost uneventful days. What would it give her in the future? For the first time she was afraid of that dim, safe future with Sandy Mackinnon. Its very surety seemed a cage.

Then a sense of remorse for her ingratitude overwhelmed her. Sandy had overridden many obstacles for her sake, had combated, no doubt, much family opposition. All he had ever told her, however, was that his father had remarked:

"I thoctit ye would have looked nearer hame."

He might have said ever so much more. The gossip from Strachur, even if he had not heard it before, must have reached him.

Sandy could have done so much better. There was, for instance, a girl at Inveraray, with plenty of money, who liked Sandy right well, and here he was marrying her, Eltrym, who would have been almost ignorant if he had not taught her. Was there anybody in the

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world as straight and true as young Alexander Mackinnon?

The shutters of the window rattled again. How the wind raged to-night, keeping pace with the thoughts of her racing brain!

Why was she, at that moment, dreaming of things that could only be impossibilities?

She cared for no one else but Sandy—how could she? Did he not stand out in her life, strong and tender and true? Had not her heart always starved for love such as this? All her life long she had craved for tenderness and sympathy, and under his outer sternness of manner Sandy had at times shown her he possessed these. It was like a shutter opening suddenly in a house deemed to be untenanted, light flashing out—and then as suddenly shut to again. But one had seen—and one knew. Then, lying there in the darkness, she thought of Cecil driving by; how he had looked and smiled and passed on, the harness glittering and flashing in the sun.

It was strange how something had leapt and thrilled within her at that recognition and then had died away, leaving a great depression.

She thought it was because she was thinking of Jeanie again, was weeping softly and without reason for the end of all her childish dreams. They were just like those poor figures, figures of earth and clay that broke so readily at a rude touch.

So the swift flying shuttle of her brain ran to and fro, weaving the few threads of her life into different patterns, grey and common, but here and there flecked with gold. She saw then that the shining threads were of Sandy's giving. Here and there as they wove their way through her life she recognised what they were—the dear friendship of poets, the living as well as the dead, the warm friendliness of books and pictures which hitherto she had never heard of or seen.

Would not Sandy and she share many such hours together in the future? He had pictured deep chairs by a leaping fire, a shaded lamp, and her head against

his knee as he read. There was to be a dog, a ragged mongrel that Sandy loved, nestling at her feet as she sat on the hearthrug and listened. Sandy had promised he would read Keats or anything else to her as long as it made her happy. Perhaps it was because the last of the summer was passing so rapidly that the thread of sadness crept for a moment into the glowing pattern of the future. One felt like that, she told herself, at the always unexpected coming of autumn. There came to her also the memory of her mother's face as it turned for one imperceptible second towards the green grassy plots beside the path. It hurt—how it hurt with its admission of unsuspected depths and reserves in her mother's nature, of softness where hitherto it seemed had been only hardness!

She was glad suddenly of the difference her marriage would make to her mother. Now she had come to know that her mother had always lived in a kind of fear, for all her harsh exterior. She began suddenly to realise all that lay behind the raging and the nagging, the extravagant denunciations of the weaknesses of the Irish nature. Her mother had stormed once: "Ye are a' Irish." Sandy had said to her, whimsically enough, "Ay, I ken ye are mair Irish than Scots. Ye need balance." Was this why she felt at times constrained to do things impulsive and alien to the ordered traditions of that household?

Was that why she felt as if in a cage and had so passionately flung herself against the stern but withal necessary bars for the protection of young hearts?

She had heard her own father say more than once of his own race, "The Irish are a fine race—but they are not always dependable; they mean well when they make a promise, but they don't always keep the promise. It's something in their nature, maybe, that they themselves can't help."

Her mother had a fanatical fear of the Irish disposition, of where it might lead, to what lengths it might go. Eltrym saw now that, regarding herself, Fear had always stalked beside her mother.

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That was it—*Fear!* Had her mother then known of the thoughts that surged in her heart, those wild impulsive thoughts, this longing to be out of the ordered ways?

She only knew that her mother now walked as if her feet no longer were manacled, that her mouth had relaxed its rigid lines, the eyes their watchfulness. She had even tried to talk to her, this new mother, as one human being to another. But it was too late.

"But I'm glad, I'm glad," said Eltrym, and she drew a long sobbing breath, "I'm glad that it will make her happy. If I had no other reason except that, I would marry Sandy."

Afterwards she was to ask herself, remembering that night, if that were the reason above all others—a drawing force that thrust for the nonce all others aside.

She fell asleep at last, a troubled sleep of many dreams that had no clarity or sequence. Out of one she woke clammy and shivering all over. She thought that the door had opened and a voice bid her follow. She found herself running along the road by Loch Fyne, with nothing but leaves under her feet, and the air full of their mouldiness. She ran on and the dark hill thrust out its surly shoulder to block her way; and far off the Giant Cobbler looked down cold and aloof and watched her struggles to pass.

And the voice called, called her clearly. She came out of a mist of troubled dreams to find the door of her room wide open as if the wind had blown it so.

"Eltrym!—Eltrym!" called a voice from outside, and her dreams fled.

She flung a shawl about her shoulders and went to the window. She threw it open and leaned out.

Below on the cobble-paved yard was Sandy.

Behind him the hill rose, and the sky, and a bleak cold wind drove heavy lowering clouds across it. And Sandy stood against it, strong and primitive, sturdy as a young oak, and against his rough tweed jacket and his brown face something glowed and wavered, a straggling new glory of pink and white and red and yellow.

Boy and girl they stood and looked at each other, grey quick-flashing eyes into blue eyes drowsy with dreams.

Then Sandy held up his first offering shyly.

"Dae ye ken their meanin'?" he said quietly, but in a voice that trembled. A Scot is nae hand at making love in public.

He had gathered for the lady of his heart the last of the summer's roses.

Part II
THE WHEEL



CHAPTER IX

SANDY'S WIFE

*When Youth goes gathering roses
And thinks not o' the thorns.*

ETHEL, STONEHOUSE.

THE kitchen window of Glenside Villa looked directly out on a green patch of lawn at the back of the house.

It was open, and its yellow casement curtains were drawn back in Christina's usual neat and precise manner.

Christina herself, keen-eyed and sallow-faced, her grey hair strained so tightly back from her forehead that at times it seemed the roots must give, was tramping monotonously back and forward across the shining brown expanse of the linoleum-covered floor, setting the table.

The very creak of new boots she was "stretching" for next Sunday sounded ominous. They said all that Christina's pursed lips scorned to say. They were righteously declaiming what Alexander Mackinnon had said to his son on his first inspection of the bride.

That was two years ago now, but to Eltrym's sensitive ears, those generously proportioned boots of Christina's were endorsing the verdict.

"This is nae place for fine ladies," the father had said, scarce troubling to lower his voice. "We are a' plain folk here, ye ken"; and again, for the second and last time, "I wad ye had looked nearer hame. Mysie Blair would ha' ta'en some beating."

Christina had spoken little or nothing that first night they came to Glenside. She had opened the door, a tall, spare, forbidding figure in her prim high-necked gown with its white ruffle about her wrinkled throat.

She had said, "Ay, ye're back again, Sandy."

And when her brother had introduced his wife, she had greeted her new sister-in-law with a brief :

"Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Mackinnon."

Eltrym, sitting out on the lawn in the new pale lilac gown, with its frills and its short sleeves that had called forth the righteous contempt of the daughter of a solemn and serious-minded Elder of the Kirk, smiled a little wearily as her mind went back to that home-coming. It was nearly two years ago now, but still when Christina was vexed she called her "Mrs. Mackinnon."

Eltrym, lying back in the deck-chair, closed her eyes wearily. She had never felt very fell since her baby was born, and now she dozed. The socks she was darning slipped from hands that had grown thin again and thready-nerved.

The summer had been hot and trying, and last night the baby, at present asleep in one of the cool inner rooms, had kept her awake for hours, and had annoyed Sandy, too, for he had been very tired. Nearly all his nights were given up to private tuition, and his temper, ordinarily under control, had been uncertain of late.

So she slept, and Christina's boots kept up a squeaky accompaniment as she went back and forwards, setting the gate-legged table for tea, covering its dark and polished oak surface with a coarse unbleached cloth, putting the blue, tulip-patterned cups and saucers and the brown teapot in their exact places and the kettle on the shining hob, while she did the innumerable other things that only Christina could find to do, until the front gate clicked and the footsteps of her father and brother came up the red-ochred brick pathway. Then she sat down and took up her knitting, her grey head bent, her lips pursed. For the moment there was only the click-click of the shining needles in the room.

By and by a harsh voice broke the stillness that hung over the house, a voice that gurgled and chuckled and laughed weirdly. From the darker corner of the fireplace opposite Christina a bundle in a chair moved

querulously. An old, a very old face disclosed itself from the bundle. Its bald pate shone and gleamed as the head nodded with incessant palsied motion.

He peered at Christina with bright, monkey-like eyes and chattered and muttered to himself. Suddenly he gave a harsh shriek like a parrot.

"Noo, noo, grandfather——" said Christina soothingly. She laid aside her knitting, rose, and brought him a glass of cool buttermilk. "Noo—noo, nae mair o't!"

He was not often like that. He had not made that strange shrieking sound for nearly a year, but in the garden Eltrym woke with a terrified start, nerves jumping, her heart racing.

As she turned her face towards the house she looked like a child fearing punishment. Her eyes were so frightened, the shadows showed purple beneath them, her mouth quivered. Then she brushed her hand across her eyes with a sigh.

How silly of her to be startled so readily! Really, she must, as Sandy said, pull herself together and not let her nerves go to pieces like that. Had not Sandy said only the other day that it was not as if she did not *know* that it was the old grandfather—a great-grandfather now that Sandy's son had arrived?

"Really, Eltrym," Sandy had said in his masterful, impatient way, "you are not a child. You should not give in to nerves or whatever you choose to call it. I call it lack of self-control. There should be no such thing as talk of nerves for young people—I am surprised at you sometimes. I really am——" And then he had added with compunction as he saw the pain leap to her eyes, "dearie."

"I must try to feel different," she told herself now; "and the poor old man canna help it. He doesn't know, maybe, that he is making the row. He is so very auld."

She could hear Christina's voice soothing him like a child and the tap of the spoon against the cup as she fed him.

She went to the door and stood framed in its space, the sunlight behind her, her pale lilac dress and delicate colour brightening the room agreeably.

"Can I help ye, Christina?" she said softly.

Christina never turned her head.

"I hae dune everything lang ago," she snapped. "I canna be sittin' oot in deck-chairs doin' naethin——" And then with a swift change of voice, "Is that the wean?"

It was. Both women heard the soft happy laughter, the chuckling and crowing that denoted his waking, the stirring and kicking of tiny toes, and crumpling of little fat fists.

Eltrym ran upstairs at once, passionately adoring. But at the top she had to stop a moment for breath. The stairs were not so steep, but they had tried her strength lately.

She brought down the baby, which still chuckled and crowed as if life in that house were a huge joke.

The wee face was very like Sandy's, but he had his mother's hair and eyes. He stared up at her, as he sucked at his pink fingers while she bent over him.

She put him on a rug and he rolled and tumbled there delighted in the sunshine. Christina came to the door once or twice and looked at him and smiled grimly. He laughed at her as he laughed at the world.

But he, too, was tired from his restlessness last night, and he fell asleep again. The passing breeze played with the yellow silk tuft of hair above his small pink face. He was very fat and heavy, and to-day Eltrym put him down on a rug on the lawn at her feet.

"The wean'll be catching a chill," said Christina from within.

"It's nae cauld," said his mother softly. She was jealous of Christina's repeated interference with the up-bringing of the tiny Sandy.

Christina shrugged her shoulders. The click-click of her knitting needles came again through the open window.

Eltrym lay back and rested; a great weariness still held her, her eyes drifted slowly to the garden around her, its tiny lawn, the prim flower-beds that surrounded it, the rose trees set at decorous intervals, and tied to sticks.

Sandy's father would be in shortly and Sandy himself soon follow.

She could see the table all duly in order, the white cloth with the blue-checked border, the dish of red and white radishes crisp and curled near the window. She would have preferred the effect of some of the pale yellow and pink roses that bordered the lawn, but Mackinnon senior hoarded his roses as a miser hoards his gold. He liked to see them against the mellowed red of the brick wall. They lasted longer on their stalks, anyway; and, like Christina, he held that flowers indoors soon died and cluttered the place.

Once he had been quite angry with his daughter-in-law because she had picked some of his roses for her room, on the very afternoon, too, when he had asked some of his friends to see the flowers; and there were the best of them upstairs in a bedroom where no one could behold them. He had never heard of such a thing!

"Dinna try to offend the auld man," Sandy had said to her. "What dae ye want roses in a bedroom for? I can't see what ye find to rave about over them. They're very well in their way, but there's mair things in life than roses."

So the roses bloomed around her, neatly secured to their sticks, and holding their heads proudly aloof as if aware that she did not own the garden.

The light breeze went by, stirring the head of the sleeping child. Eltrym bent and gently wrapped the plaid rug closer around him.

The afternoon was very still. On a lawn near at hand children laughed and played, and at intervals the wind brought faint echoes to her.

Beyond the low wall was another garden such as this. The whole street—priding itself on its exclusive-

ness—had such primitive gardens, high walls and rustic seats or pergolas. All the porches over the back doors were alike. All the windows stared in the same way towards the windows and the small exclusive gardens of another row of similar houses. Each front entrance was alike, the whitewashed stone steps, the brick or flagged paths, the small gates that bore on a white-painted board or bronzed plate the name of the villa. She stared at the view without seeing it; it was becoming stale from satiety. There were times when she passionately longed for bare boulder-strewn fields, for ploughed paddocks, dark, furrowed, and heaving against the sky, for great mountains frowning down at this snug contentment.

But Glenside had an air of assurance and of complete satisfaction with its part in life. It had a special bow-window to distinguish it from the other houses. It had an extra two steps because here the land sloped abruptly, a physical feature which lent to the villa a more elegant appearance than its neighbours.

Eltrym closed her eyes because she did not want to look at all those houses, those lines of new villas in their sandstone sameness, their ornamental trees that made her weary for the pines and the grand firs of Hell's Glen.

She did not go indoors, because the old man was more garrulous than usual this afternoon and Christina more moody.

She sighed a little. Sandy grew strangely moody, too, at times. When he was tired he was also irritable. He looked on it as a personal injury when she asked him why he worked so hard.

"*Why?* Because I have to. How else do you think I could keep things going? Won't we want a home of our own some day?"

She had ventured then, too eagerly, perhaps, to ask :

"Couldn't we have it now, Sandy? All to ourselves, you and baby and I——"

Sandy had been very curt as well as firm on the subject.

"We couldn't live as cheaply as we do now. I pay my father for our board and lodging and it helps him. He has not overmuch nowadays. I canna expect him to live on his small capital——"

"But couldn't you make him a small allowance?"

Sandy had said:

"Now, Eltrym, that will do. I've given you the best home I can, and there's an end to it. You are over keen on change, I am afraid. Didn't you say you would be happy when you married me, that you didn't care even if we had to live in a but-and-ben?"

"But, Sandy——"

He had terminated the interview, as Sandy always did when anything that displeased him was under discussion. With an angry shrug of his shoulders he walked out of the room.

When he came back, of course, he would be repentant, but he would not say a word about it, only hold her tightly as he kissed her.

There had been a breeze between them this morning over the baby. Sandy had aired his views on the bringing up of his son.

"You don't seem to remember," she flashed, "that he is my son, too. And I won't be lectured——"

And the end of it was that Sandy had gone out banging the door.

And he would come home and in their room kiss her and be kind and considerate, to imply that he was sorry. And she had always forgiven him. Hitherto after incidents like that she had felt remorseful.

But to-day a spirit of rebellion burned in her. She had gone down Main Street and deliberately bought herself this new frock and as deliberately brought it home and donned it.

It was far too dainty a thing, she knew, for the purpose of sitting about in afternoons in the garden. It was far too graceless a confection ever to enter the sober portal of the kirk her father-in-law frequented.

And Sandy would first of all be angry and then sarcastic about it. Before she had married, she had never

thought of Sandy in any of the moods in which she had since known him. Sometimes he was moody for days at a time, answering only in monosyllables.

Perhaps it was the attitude of his relatives towards her—how they sat and stared at her as if she were a being out of another world! They were ever ill at ease with her, though they whispered proudly among themselves :

“Hae ye seen oor Sandy’s wife?”

CHAPTER X

FADING ROSES

*Pass, thou wild heart,
Wild heart of youth that still
Hast half a will
To stay.*

WILLIAM WATSON.

ELTRYM carried the baby upstairs, and, laying him in his tiny cot, tucked the clothes round with trembling hands.

She wandered aimlessly and restlessly about the room for awhile, that room which was to her at any rate so hideously inartistic with its faded wall-paper, its worn red carpet and its green rep curtains.

The four-poster bed of dark wood had an elaborately starched canopy and valances and took up a great deal of space. It was a pity, seeing this was the best bedroom, that Eltrym did not appreciate it more! She had once—unheard of heresy!—suggested to Christina that a delicate goblin-blue casement cloth and lighter furniture would transform the room. Christina had been thunderstruck at such presumption.

If the bed had been good enough for *them*, it was good enough for anyone! Had not her great-grandmother died in that very bed? Had not her grandmother's own hands made that generous feather mattress? Were not those green curtains—"faded a wee bittie, maybe"—family heirlooms?

The idea, indeed! And Christina had snorted in fine disdain—the idea of anyone even suggesting that these things should go! Why, they were a very part of the house, an integral part of its existence. To talk of displacing them with white enamel furniture, forsooth, and

pastel casement curtains and chair-coverings! Christina had treated the mere suggestion with the most righteous contempt. She had muttered darkly down in the kitchen for days afterwards. If the house was not good enough for some folk it was good enough for *them*. She would like to know whose house it was, anyway.

Once Eltrym, with the help of a few yards of chintz, had made an attempt at decoration.

"The room screams at me sometimes," she had said to Sandy.

Sandy had stared. His slow, practically working mind had taken some time to digest her meaning. In the meantime he had lectured—there was no other word for it—his young and apparently frivolous wife on absurd statements. Most logically he had demonstrated that a room or any other inanimate thing cannot "scream." Eltrym had been curiously unconvinced. She had even, for the first time in Sandy's memory, given a weary sigh as if the discussion bored her. Sandy as a tutor lecturing her was one thing, but as a husband surely he might now drop that attitude towards her.

She had stuck to her plans and bought some cheap flowered cretonne, pink rosebuds on a white ground and a latticework of palest green. Christina sniffed audibly when it came home. She had made no comment, but the light of wait-and-see lurked in her cold grey eyes. She bided her time.

When Sandy had come home on that auspicious occasion he knew that something was amiss as soon as he put his foot over the threshold. Christina's lips were grim and compressed. She breathed heavily, with the air of one a martyr to asthma. The very house had an air of long-suffering martyrdom.

When Sandy asked her if she had a cold, Christina had answered shortly:

"I've nae cauld—and I'm no an interferin' body, either. It's no for me to say anything."

All of which was Greek to Sandy. But he sensed the perturbed atmosphere. He had felt as he went upstairs that Eltrym was to blame. Eltrym seemed always to

blame lately. He did wish she would study Christina more! What had she been up to now?

He found her on her knees before an ancient chair. She had covered its shiny horsehair surface with the gay cretonne which the shop assistant had assured her washed and wore as well as chintz at seven times the price.

She looked up as Sandy opened the door; her cheeks were flushed with excitement, her fair hair was ruffled about her face, and her eyes shone.

"Oh, Sandy!" she said, and then: "But I didn't want you to come in until I'd finished. I've only got half the frill to do. Won't it look dainty and pretty?"

She sat on the floor looking expectantly up at him, waiting for him to agree, to admire, to see in imagination the finished picture as she herself saw it.

But Sandy looked round and discovered that, in the enthusiasm of making the loose covers, she had forgotten to turn and fold back the counterpane—a ritual always hitherto scrupulously observed.

On it still lay, as she had tossed them, her jacket and hat. Now nobody did that sort of thing with impunity at Glenside. On the floor beside her was a tumbled glimmer of the pink and green of the remaining chintz. Christina would have folded it.

"I had to put the bairn to sleep; he was a bit cross the day," said Eltrym, "or I'd have finished it."

Sandy grunted. He looked with dissatisfaction around the usually neat and orderly room.

"What do ye think of it?" Eltrym cried gaily.

The answer came like a douche of cold water.

"Think?" snorted Sandy. "Why, it looks like a pawnshop!"

She sat quite still on the floor. The colour went out of her face as if she had been struck. She bent her head that he should not see the quick tears that flashed to her eyes.

"What's wrong with things as they are?" demanded Sandy. He picked up the cretonne and began methodically to fold it. "Ye've got far too much stuff

here. Christina will never stand this sort of rubbish about the house. Ye ken that!"

He counted the yards as he folded, with a fire of running comment—"Nine, ten, eleven, fourteen. Good heavens! Did ye buy up the stock? What did you want so much stuff for? Ye must be going to cover all the chairs in the house. Fifteen, sixteen—how much did ye pay for it?"

She did not speak, but sat biting her lip. She felt like a very foolish schoolgirl, condemned to a seat at the far end of the bench. The pink roses on the green lattice danced in a shimmer of tears.

"If ye had to earn the money," Sandy went on, still folding with maddening carefulness and method the cheap and dainty subject of discussion, "if ye had to earn it, Eltrym, ye wouldna be wastin' it in this absurd fashion! Sixteen yaids o' rubbish that winna wash!"

She had flashed into anger that was new to him.

"Ye're an auld woman to be foldin' stuff like that!" she retorted. "Put it down; it's mine——"

Sandy was terribly hurt at being called an old woman. He tossed the stuff aside. His anger was easily roused, and now it leaped to flame.

"Your stuff!" he sneered. "Oh, it is, is it? I'd like ye to remember who has to pay for it."

She had faced him, hands clenched, her head high.

"I'll pay for it, Sandy Mackinnon!"

He shrugged his shoulders, and his tone became very sarcastic.

"Ay, I can see you doin' it! How would ye earn it? Makin' covers, I suppose, an' with no training at the work!" He smiled contemptuously. "If ye had to make covers for a living, Eltrym, ye would often sleep in the open!"

"I will pay for it," she broke in quickly. "I will earn money myself."

Sandy laughed. His temper was cooling down now.

"Maybe ye'll take in sewing," he suggested; "or will ye gae oot by the day?"

She looked at him fiercely, the colour hot in her cheeks.

"You'll see," she said, and then and there inspiration had come to her.

She saw again a vision of the old hut on the hill by Loch Fyne and the lad who had said to her so gravely :

"Some day, when you are older, if you still make songs you must send them to me in London."

Her hands clenched.

"And I will—I will!" she said to herself. "I will start to-morrow, and I won't tell anyone—not a soul!" And then, like a sharp sword of desolation, the thought cut across her life and left its mark : "Even if I did, no one would understand."

Then all at once she broke down and became a little girl again. She kneeled by the chair and laid her wet face against the gay pink roses. Her tears dripped on the green lattice, and she sobbed as if her heart would break.

In a moment Sandy was by her, repentant, distressed, loving beyond words. He gathered her to his broad chest and soothed her as if it were his wee son, instead of his wife, that he so held.

"Now, now, dearie! Dinna cry so, my wee lassie!" He patted her shoulder with his big brown hand. "Dinna sob like that!"

"Ye were so angry wi' me," she whispered.

All her old terror of nagging, of angry words revived. She clutched at his dark serge coat, wordlessly begging him never, never again to hurt her so.

Had she put that feeling of shrinking, uncontrollable terror into words Sandy might even, if only dimly, have understood the bruise which her mother's ceaseless nagging had left on her sensitive heart. But she only clung to him, apparently repentant.

Sandy kissed her.

"We'll say nae mair about it, lassie. There!—there!"

He lifted her to her feet, and for a moment they stood together, drawn nearer to each other than ever

before. Then up the stairs came the faint slip-slap, slip-slap that heralded the one maid-of-all-work, the pale ghost who glided greyly about the house, and flitted in and out of the scullery, like one apart. They separated as, without a preliminary knock, she thrust her gaunt, colourless face around the door.

"The meal is on the table," she said curtly, and then she slip-slapped drearily downstairs again and into her scullery kingdom.

Christina, who believed in weekly "spring cleanings," turned out the best bedroom a week later, and, not without secret triumph, it must be confessed, scornfully consigned the chair-cover to the laundry.

Small things naturally loomed large in Christina's small world. She went about the house for that week with an air of expectation. On the day the laundry returned Christina was vindicated. The light that loomed behind her pale eyes proved she felt justified.

At the hour of the great institution of "high tea" she opened the laundry-basket and sorted the clothes carefully to see that everything had come back.

Without undue haste she brought forth something elaborate, starched and frilled, indeed, but clay-white in appearance. Christina laid it down beside Mrs. Sandy with no comment save:

"There's yon chair-cover. Ye would be wanting to take it up to your room, maybe."

The eyes of the family turned on it instantly. Eltrym just stared at it. Then her face flushed and her teeth set in her lower lip. She fought hard not to cry as she glanced at Christina.

But Christina's baffling face was expressionless; one would say, quite indifferent. Her pale eyes were intent on the brown muffler she was knitting. The old man muttered querulously in the corner by the chimney-place.

Sandy said, "But that's not our cover, surely!"

Christina jerked her knitting contemptuously.

"An' whose else would it be?"

"But it had pink roses!" His eyes turned to his

wife and he saw the meaning of her silence. "Why, it's all washed out!" he declared.

Christina sniffed.

"What would ye be expectin'? I kenned that mysel' as soon as I saw the rubbish."

Her father broke the silence gallantly, if clumsily :

"Weel, weel, there's aye some that wull spend their money foolishly. Ye canna put auld heids on young shouthers. It's mebbe a lesson."

"And mebbe no," said Christina dryly.

Mackinnon senior laughed and patted Eltrym's shoulder as he rose from the table.

"Ah, weel, I wad na mak ony mair o' thae covers, lassie." He went over and examined it carefully, chuckling : "There's nae pink roses there now, anyways!"

The oldest man of all caught up the words and began to chatter. Perhaps into his age-worn, darkened mind one word had pierced like a flash of light from the grey world of his senility.

"Pink roses!" he chattered—"pink roses!" And his frosty pow nodded violently like a wind-seamed flower on its stalk. "Ay, I mind weel thae pink roses; an' Peggy Munro waitin' at the auld yett. Yon were the days—ay, the great days! Pink roses——" And he gabbled into indistinguishable mutterings again. The roses faded abruptly out of his life as they had faded out of Eltrym's ill-fated cover.

No one listened to him, save Eltrym.

"I could ha' told you that as soon as I saw it, Sandy," Christina said, as she picked up her knitting again. Sandy might well have looked nearer hame.

Eltrym still said nothing; but as she drank her tea the hands that held her cup trembled. Something in her life seemed to have faded like the cretonne roses. There was no reason why it should be so, because of a woman's careless washing and a shopman's idle promises; but there it was.

Sandy and his father were having an interesting discussion on materials, but Christina had the last word.

"Ah, there's naething like green rep!" she declared.

CHAPTER XI

CRACKS IN THE POTTERY

*For in the Market-place, one Dusk of Day,
I watch'd the Potter thumping his wet Clay.*
THE RUBÁIYÁT.

As Eltrym sat in her room, in all the glory of the pale lilac frock, the incident of the faithless cretonne roses came back to her.

That Sandy's father was cross she knew full well. His denunciation that she looked like a play-actress had been all too scathing, even in a house where play-actresses were looked on with righteous horror as daughters of the devil.

The rebellion had died down. The fire that had warmed her was almost turned to ashes. But here and there an ember of discontent burned.

Why couldn't she have pretty dresses like other women? Some of the girls in that very exclusive street wore dainty frocks and fascinating hats. True, the macintosh and umbrella, like the poor, were always with us. But now and again a blue, or cherry, or rose-pink sport-jacket went gaily by, its owner bearing herself with the air of one who was aware that she ran the gauntlet of a hundred disapproving or envious eyes.

Eltrym had felt like that when, in the face of Christina's evident displeasure, she had sat out on the lawn in that pale lilac confection with its delicate lace and tiny frills. She had been hurt by her father-in-law's stern criticism. Truly, this was not a house where folk spoke behind your back. It would have been less wearing to one's nerves if they had.

And Sandy would be here at any moment. Eltrym,

always intensely sensitive, began to dread the click of the front-gate and the sound of his firm footsteps.

Tired and brain-fagged because of a long sleepless night and endless perambulations up and down, up and down with the fretful, teething baby, she felt unready for the discussion that would surely follow, unequal to plod after Sandy's mind as it went over and over the ground.

She wished almost that the baby would wake so that she might be fully occupied when Sandy came in. Sandy hated to see her idle. And then the knowledge came to her that she was afraid of Sandy, and she shrank more than ever from the discussion to come.

Should she take off her frock and hide it? No word could be said. Only an audible sniff or two from Christina would denote anything amiss. The pale eyes would be curiously triumphant, that was all.

Then Eltrym set her teeth as on that day when, with a roll of rose-patterned cretonne, she had dared the shades of all the dead and gone Mackinnons as well as braved the living in their den.

The gate clicked and she heard Sandy's voice. He was talking to his father in the strip of garden bordering the path :

"Gordon was telling me he has some fine cuttings. He has a new standard rose he got frae London——"

"Ay, an' a fine price, too, I'll be bound," grumbled the old man.

"It's an awfu' price," agreed Sandy. She heard him knock out the ashes of his pipe against the wall ere he turned to come indoors. "But maybe I'll manage to get ye one or two for the garden——"

"Mebbe," said the old man dryly. "I'm thinkin' that ye will find plenty ither things to do wi' your money."

Sandy laughed : "Och, I can spare ye something."

The old man grunted : "Weel—we wull see," and bent to the garden again. "We wull see, son."

Sandy came in whistling. She heard his voice to Christina, always in his first question :

"Where's Eltrym?"

And Christina's short reply:

"Upstairs."

"What's the matter?" from Sandy. "Hae ye the toothache again?"

Christina's reply was inaudible to Eltrym.

"Well, what's wrong wi' ye the day?" persisted Sandy jovially.

"Naething!" said Christina with the air and voice of a much-enduring woman. But it held its message. Sandy came upstairs, whistling more seriously.

Eltrym went and sat on a chair, that old shiny-surfaced horsehair affair with which we have already become acquainted, and crossed her hands in her lap.

As Sandy came into the bedroom she heard the clatter of knives and rattle of dishes from below, and the old grandfather's voice shrilly protesting. He was in a bad mood to-day.

Sandy stopped short on the threshold and looked at his wife abruptly. He ceased whistling. His eyes took in every detail of her frock, the way she had fluffed her hair, and the mutinous lines of her figure. He stiffened perceptibly.

"Why—what's this?" he asked.

She looked at him calmly: "A new frock, Sandy."

"I can see that." He frowned at it. "It looks awfu' fine, even if it's hardly appropriate for all occasions. Is it paid for?"

She made a *moue* at him:

"No: they said I could be havin' an account at any time. The man said he kenned you and your father well. He would be awfu' pleased to let me have it, or anything else."

Sandy said dryly: "Nae doot he would. How much did it cost?"

She told him in shillings.

He stared at her: "D'ye mean to say ye gave that much for a rag like that?"

"It's no' a rag"—she fingered its daintiness—"it was

the prettiest thing i' the window. There was quite a crowd speirin' it."

"Ay, and they can be lookin' at it again to-morrow. I'll pack it up the nicht for ye. Don't ye think ye had better tak' it aff so that Christina can iron oot the creases? He'll no take it back, mebbe, if he kens you have worn it."

Slowly she had grown white. She had looked at him curiously while he was speaking. Now she found her voice:

"It's no going back, Sandy."

"It isn't, isn't it?" said Sandy. "Then who is going to pay for it?"

She looked at him with something of contempt in her eyes:

"I am."

"I believe I have heard that before. Hae ye come in for any money lately? It's the first I've heard of it."

Her eyes did not waver. "I will pay for it," she repeated.

"D'ye mind," sneered Sandy, "telling me how?" He was now *very* angry. She had not only done a thing he utterly disapproved of, such as incurring debt, but she had not even asked his permission, or said she was sorry.

She said nothing, only her lips folded together in a strange set way. Her eyes looked away from him to the window, saw the green glimmer of the tree-tops across the road, a glimpse of the sky beyond.

"It will take some time," she said as if to herself.

"Ay, it wull that," Sandy observed. He began to pace up and down the room, ignoring or oblivious of the fact that he might wake his sleeping son and heir. He waxed sarcastic. "I should say it would take a very long time, indeed. And I can see *them* waiting until you pay! They would a' be deid an' oot o' business before *that* happened. I ken well they will be no sae sweet in a month or twa." He looked contemptuously at the lilac frock. "A pretty rag indeed for fifty shil-

lings! They get no money oot of me, I can tell ye that, Eltrym."

She remained silent and her very silence fanned Sandy's anger into flame. Hitherto there had been but small tiffs, a few hasty words, and a passionately remorseful making-up on both sides.

But now Eltrym sat very still and pale, consumed by a fierce revolt against Sandy's dictatorial methods, against the narrowness of the house and the rigidly righteous folk who moved therein, against the prim, callous ways alien to Youth which loved life and laughter and pretty things.

She held her head very high, her lips firm, her chin proudly lifted, and all the time she was crying to herself as Sandy raged on, "I've never had anything out of life, never—never—and I thought it would be different—and now it will be just the same, always and always."

For the first time, clearly at any rate, she saw this house as a cage, and its grimly disapproving household as so many jailers. But Sandy had always been there, ready to stand by her and champion her, ready with his love and his care and his sympathy. And now he was failing her. More than once of late he had failed her. He was joining the enemy.

Surely, it could not be Sandy who was standing there now, head bent in bulldog fashion, eyes flashing angrily at her. She felt bewildered, buffeted about, and already bruised with the unequal conflict.

She made one last effort to throw from her mind that vision of the cage of Sandy and his relations standing by it, calmly consigning her to a prison of their narrow, conventional making.

She found herself saying, "But, Sandy, you know I do like pretty things——"

"Hae ye never considered," retorted Sandy, pausing in his walk, "that I might like them as weel?"

"But—I've never had one pretty frock since we were married——"

"Ye were not needing them. Folk keep their frocks

for years. Look at Christina, and the way she keeps her——”

“Oh! Christina——” she breathed.

Sandy turned abruptly: “Oh, I ken that ye think my folk are no guid enough for ye.”

“I have never said it——”

“Ye have no need to say it. They *feel* it, and that’s enough——” He paced on and addressed the window.

“Oh, the McCrimmons o’ Bald Gourie!” he mocked.

“Fine fowk, their heids aye high, and their bellies aye empty——”

“*Sandy!*”

But he would not listen. Words came with a rush: “But I’d hae ye remember that pride comes before a fall. I’d hae ye remember that. Bald Gourie remembers it the day.”

“*Sandy!*” She stood up now, taller than her wont, her hands clenched. At something in her voice Sandy turned and saw a light in her eyes he had never seen there before. He saw, too, a picture which he never quite forgot as long as he lived—the picture of a woman who, curiously enough, seemed no longer his wife but someone strange and alien, standing in a heliotrope gown against the dark mantel, the fair head proud and high, the eyes cold, contemptuous, judging him.

There came over Sandy for an instant the queer feeling of that morn in the kirk by Loch Fyne when he stared at the broken lion on the grey slabs at his feet.

For a moment his wife stood before him, so near that his hand might touch her, so far that a tideless sea seemed to flow between them.

How far does this instinct of class and class go back in the lives of these old countries of the world? How deep flows class-hatred, for all that we prate of democracy?

For a moment Eltrym stood before her husband as she had appeared to his father that afternoon, and as an aristocrat in the Revolution might have borne herself before the fury of the mob. She was not his wife in that

moment. She was one of the McCrimmons of Bald Gourie.

She stood, smiling faintly and contemptuously. Her dress clung to her, part of her heritage, her daintiness, her finer breeding. There are some things Time cannot take away, it seems.

Then Sandy struck cruelly a blow of words, where perhaps long ago a forbear of his would have lifted his fist.

"Ye are mighty proud," he flung at her, "but ye hae a mair convenient memory than most folk. They're not sae good at forgetting. D'ye think my faither or Christina will be forgetting about Jeanie?"

The felon blow struck her as between the eyes. He saw her bend, almost break under the taunt, and for a moment remorse broke over him, then savage fury had its way.

"I cannot speak of Jeanie and her disgrace. But you can speak of Christina. Christina's no guid enough for you, maybe—Christina the most respected person in the whole district. And ye treat her as if she were the dirt under your feet. It's that damned McCrimmon manner o' yours. There's little of the Glesca Irish about ye, after all. There's nae nonsense in the but-an-bens o' the Hardies, I'm thinkin'."

She said very clearly: "That is enough, Sandy."

And when he would have raged on, she said in that cold, still voice:

"You have said enough."

Sandy went to the door, opened it and banged it behind him. Then he opened it again almost instantly. His wife still stood where he had left her. Her eyes, turning to the door, still challenged him. They asked him why he came back.

Sandy spoke doggedly: "I'm going downstairs to write to those people. I'll tell them that ye are to buy nothing more there without my written permission."

She looked at him with a sudden cold hostility, new to her.

"There's no debts ever incurred in this house before

you came, I'd have you know," said Sandy. "And there never will now, while I can prevent it. Is there anything else you owe?"

"No."

Sandy was more collected now: "As you've worn the dress I suppose you had better keep it. But you'll please oblige me by not wearing it in this house."

"Then," she suggested coldly, "you will perhaps oblige me by doing what I have often asked you to do, having a home of your own."

"Perhaps I shall," said Sandy, "but I'll go when it suits me to go, not before."

He slammed the door to and went downstairs.

CHAPTER XII

THE CLOSING DOOR

*The water dripped on the stone,
So steadily, day by day,
We could not know, till the years were gone,
Till Youth was over and Love was done,
And the stone was worn away.*

E. QUINN.

WHEN her husband had gone Eltrym sank into a chair and hid her face in her hands. Her brain was like a whirling wheel that raced round and round under the passionate impetus of her thoughts.

Life was over and done with. Sandy hated her, and she—she had actually found herself hating Sandy! A great gulf yawned before her and separated them.

And all over a lilac frock which the neighbour whom she met shopping had suggested would suit her and which was also so cheap! It was like Eltrym not to mention the neighbour's part in it, or her power of persuasion.

And now life seemed as if it could never be the same again. Something had gone out of it. She knew that for days now Sandy would sulk, and be sullen in his replies. He was like that in small tiffs. What would it be in this more serious affair?

He had made her feel a criminal, had averred that she had obtained goods on false pretences. Yet she had only done as her neighbour and countless other women had done every day of their lives—had ordered goods and had them sent home. And the husbands paid. They liked to have their wives in pretty frocks.

All but Sandy. Sandy was different. What was it he had said? What, indeed, had he not said?

He had taunted her with the fact that he had not had a new overcoat since he got married, that his boots had made many journeys to the repair shop, that his last hat was of the very cheapest quality, that were it not for Christina's industry there would be few buttons, indeed, to his shirts.

"But there's no need for him to go without," she said. "He is saving money. He has it put by. I don't want him to go without. Why should he want me to do so always?"

It was her first extravagance—if such it were—since their marriage, the one dress, owing to her mother's generosity in the matter of her trousseau, which Sandy had to pay for up till now. True, there had been a hat or two, and there had been a breeze over them, because Sandy could not see why the old ones would not do. Did not Christina keep hers for years and years, and then have them remodelled with the aid of a flower or feather, that somehow always looked exactly like the last?

But Christina was forty-four and grey, and the blood ran slowly in her veins. Sandy, who had never been young, could not understand what a bunch of pink roses on a green-latticed chintz, or a lilac frock that is "marked down" at a sale, can mean for youth. Eltrym loved dainty pretty things. She liked to have them about her. She hated gloom and gloomy people.

Eltrym, hushing the baby that had awakened fretful, thought and thought until her head ached.

Had she been haughty to Christina and her father-in-law? She had no remembrance of it. She had always held her head like that as a child at Strachur school; and, queerly enough, the children, too, had resented it. They had called her "stuck-up" and proud, and jeered at her, and the more they jeered the higher she held her head, because she simply could not help it. It just went so of itself.

"I was born that way, I suppose," she said to herself; "I can't help it."

But Sandy would have argued that she could. She

had found herself of late shrinking more and more from audible expressions of what she felt. They seemed always to lengthen into arguments and long-winded discussions that seemed to lead nowhere. All the Mackinnons were like that, in the matter of argument. And they listened to Sandy with much respect, because he had a good education and was therefore likely to know what he was talking about.

The baby fell asleep, its fair head against the lace of the lilac frock. Eltrym looked down at the little creature and held it tight. For a moment fear came over her.

"If I hadn't you, wee one," she said, "I'd be very, very lonely at times, I'm thinking."

Sandy had said more than once that she put the child before him, that *he* was not studied nowadays. He was like a hurt child himself when he spoke in that way.

Eltrym sighed. Poor Sandy! He would be so vexed for all he had said. Any moment he would come up and, looking at her sitting there, suddenly catch her in his arms and whisper he was sorry. He would beg her to forgive.

But it mattered curiously little just then whether he did or not. She passed her hand wearily across her brow and pushed back the heavy wave of hair. She felt tired and bruised with the conflict. It had left her more weary of heart and soul than she ever remembered.

The thought of the inevitable making-up brought little or no thrill with it. She was only conscious of this great, almost overwhelming weariness. Sometimes she felt tired of life. How foolish of her to bother over a silly frock! What did it matter what she wore? She must content herself with other things. She must shut her eyes to the apparent incongruities of red carpets and green rep curtains, or yellow plush suites and the stiff white lace curtains of the drawing-room. She must not let these things hurt her.

When Sandy and she had their own home it would be different. Maybe he would let her choose some of

the things, anyway. She would have dainty chintzes galore and modern pictures with their beauty of grace and line, no hideous, if valuable, etchings of Days of Judgment and Eve appearing from the rib of Adam, or weirdly attired men, utterly expressionless, on wooden-looking horses.

She was young and forgot these scenes quickly, and though this one had hurt and shaken her as none other had done, she fell into a pleasant reverie of what that home of their own would be like.

From the foot of the stairs Sandy's voice called sharply :

"Tea's ready !"

She wrinkled her nose and made a *moue* at the closed door.

"Ye can wait !" she said to it.

Sandy wasted no more breath in calling her. She heard him mounting the stairs. He stood in the doorway.

"Tea's ready !"

"Very well !" she said. She got up and the baby stirred.

"I'll take him," said Sandy shortly. She gave the child to him without a word. Sandy turned from the cot where he had laid his son down.

"Are ye not going to brush your hair ?"

"I am not," she said. An impish flicker was in her eye as she pinned a loose coil into place.

"Ye will have barely time to change that dress," said Sandy, without looking at her. "The toast is in."

"Then I'll not keep it waiting," she said. "It would never do to be unpunctual, especially in such a grave matter as toast !"

Sandy's mouth set in its firm line. He uttered no further word, however, but went down the stairs.

Eltrym followed silently. When she came into the big, shining kitchen where all the meals were held except when there was company, the other members of the household were in their places. The father was obviously waiting, and they were hardly seated when

he began the prayers. Behind him, in his corner, bright eyes peered, and yellow, skeleton-like fingers clawed for imaginary food.

Always her father-in-law read as grace a few words from the Bible that lay open before him. His slow, serious voice sounded solemnly now in the Psalms, without any change of tone from first to last :

"Sing aloud unto God our strength : make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery."

Eltrym had almost a hysterical desire to laugh aloud. The pleasant harp and the psaltery would find no place in this household. The idea of Christina singing aloud, or her father making a joyful noise !

In his chair in the corner the old grandfather suddenly chuckled, laughed eerily as if her thought had been transmitted to him, and he was very much amused over it. The bright, monkey-like eyes peered at her, and he cackled loudly again as at a huge joke.

When the meal was finished—it was "high tea" with freshly baked scones and toast and cake, and eggs, for the household at Glenside dined at midday—Sandy got up and went upstairs to change.

He had a lesson to give that evening, a few streets away, and generally Eltrym walked with him, wheeling the baby's pram, on the warmer summer evenings.

But to-night Sandy went alone.

Eltrym wandered into the drawing-room instead of upstairs. Overhead she could hear Sandy's muffled footsteps as he moved about in stockinged feet to avoid waking the baby.

Eltrym walked restlessly about the drawing-room. It was a room the appointments of which always provoked her. Everything was in its ordered place as on the first day of its furnishing, the bow window with its yellow glazed flower-pot. Nearly every house in that street had aspidistras in a similar position.

"How I hate aspidistras !" said Eltrym. "I will never have one in my house, never—ugly, dull things !"

Then she thought drearily that her father-in-law

would be generous enough to insist on his son accepting some of them; and his son would be dutiful enough to insist that they should be given the place of honour. They would be put in a bow window, too, because Sandy's people had always put pots of aspidistras in bow windows. She could almost hear Sandy adding doggedly :

—"And what's good enough for them is good enough for me."

She put her hand to her head. How it ached! And how Sandy banged drawers in and out! What was the use of taking off his boots if he made such a row with his hands! Ah, well, if he woke the baby now it would perhaps sleep better later in the night and she would not have to tramp the floor once more!

She looked round the drawing-room again. What a dreary place it was, and yet how proud the family was of it! Christina, in one of her rare moments of confidence, had said complacently that there was nothing like it in the whole of that street, and, indeed, many others.

The wall-paper was green, embossed with thick gilt scrolls like snails. Green also—but a moss green that almost set one's teeth on edge—was the carpet, with its narrow border in a darker shade. There was none of your gimcrack artistic imitations of different periods about the dark, heavy furniture. It was solid and plain, good and law-abiding, like its owner.

The tangerine-yellow plush was fading now, more from the sun than actual use. There were two arm-chairs, hideous and uncomfortable, and a sofa in the suite, and a cushion here and there in patchwork, with tassels at each corner.

A sideboard had evidently strayed in by mistake, but Christina and her father considered it was a pity that such a big, solid piece of furniture should not be in the best room in full view of any caller.

On it were displayed the best pieces of silver, with little or no question as to their appropriateness for a drawing-room, a photo-frame here and there, including

one of Christina when she was younger. But when one looked at it one felt that Christina had never been young. She had always been just Christina.

On the mantelpiece with its coloured crochet border was a mirror that was related to the sideboard, and on the wall were crayon portraits or enlarged photographs, and a print of "The Last Judgment," which dared you to be frivolous, even if the room itself had not effectively squashed this deplorable instinct in you.

Eltrym sat on the sofa and stared through the stiffly arranged lace curtains at the aspidistras. Would Sandy come down to her or would she go up to him? Anything for a breath of air outside, anything indeed—yes, it had already come to that—to get out of this house for the moment. Whereas the room upstairs had at times "screamed" at her, now she wanted to scream in this. She felt that if she looked round she must rush out of it—anywhere.

Yet thousands upon thousands of homes in Britain were like this. That ugly, foolish suite in red or yellow or green plush seemed to have an overwhelming fascination for certain people. Carpets of excruciating green will always find admirers—why, heaven only knows, except that there will always be people of appallingly bad taste in the matter of decorative effect.

How Eltrym hated that room, its glaring carpet, its wool-flowers in prim glass shades, its seldom-if-ever-opened piano! She had seen its blight fall on even the gayest of Sandy's chums once they entered that room.

Christina came into it now, serious, righteous-minded Christina, in her black silk gown with a hand-crocheted collar and her yellow cairngorm brooch. She brought the eternal knitting, and seated herself in a stiff-backed chair by the window. She did not speak to her sister-in-law. There was significance in her silence, in the very poise of her grey head. She wore steel-rimmed spectacles and her eyes blinked rapidly behind them as she knitted.

The silence grew almost unbearable. From the

scullery the grey ghost drifted about, busy dish-washing and pot-scouring. In the kitchen the father read his paper, while the grandfather snored unmusically, his mouth open and his tongue dropped against his lower jaw. A handkerchief would be tucked beneath his chin because he dribbled like a baby, and also because he had lately had a new suit. It was their pride that they always kept him "respectable."

Eltrym shuddered. It came over her all at once that she was afraid of the inexpressible dreariness of the house. Its rigidly narrow ways and outlook depressed her spirits. She felt as if all the joy of her life were being very slowly but very surely sapped.

She felt as if she must run upstairs to Sandy, putting all her foolish pride aside. She could not stay another minute in this room, with Christina's dark form outlined against the light. The click of the needles would drive her mad. Oh, why didn't Christina say something?

Eltrym turned to her desperately: "Did you speak?"

Christina did speak, and decidedly, coldly:

"Sandy's socks are a' fu' o' holes. They've no been darned for weeks. And there's twa buttons off his shirt."

Eltrym got up and went out of the room. Christina was surprised at her obedience, perhaps disappointed that it was so instant. She was in a mood, to use her own words, "for a straight talk."

Eltrym stood at the foot of the stairs, her hands clenched, the knuckles pressed against her mouth.

She must not scream. She must not rush outside. She must not give way to hysteria. Had she not fought through harder times than this? She must *not* give way.

She went up the stairs, step by step, very slowly. She was tired and her feet dragged. Had Sandy looked round he would have thought her small white face pinched and pathetic.

But Sandy was tying his tie before the glass with the

aloof air of utter concentration on that intricate process. To-night's pupil, a new one, was the son of a former provost whose influence was not to be ignored. Therefore Sandy had donned his best suit in order to make an impressive appearance.

"Sandy!"

"Well"—his tone was not encouraging.

"Are you going out?"

"Am I going out?" Sandy spoke to the mirror with a did-you-ever-hear-such-an-absurd-question sort of tone. "*Am I going out!*"

He had finished his tie and now he opened the handkerchief drawer and selected a handkerchief in his careful, methodical manner.

"You know I always go out every Thursday night," he said, as if with the dull sense of injury of one who has been asked a needlessly foolish question. He waited. "Well?"

His wife sighed but made no answer. She went over to the darning-basket instead and began to sort out socks and yarn and needles.

"*Well?*" repeated Sandy irritably. "Did you want to know anything?"

"Nothing," she said, her head bent.

"Oh, if you speak in that tone." And Sandy went out, banging the door to show what he thought of the matter.

Eltrym still knelt by the stocking-basket. She heard him say something to his father, open and shut the hall door, and the gate click. His steps echoed on the pavement and then passed on out of hearing.

Sandy had gone, gone brutally, flinging words irritably over his shoulder to her ere he banged the door. How she wished that he would get out of that habit of banging doors! He knew that it annoyed her more than anything.

The silence of the house grew. The light died out of the room slowly. She sewed on the last button in its place.

She felt choked and undid the neck of her gown.

Why was she so weary, not only in body—that would pass—but in mind?

Sandy had gone like that and she had always known he would come back in different mood. But now, strangely enough, she felt she did not care what mood Sandy came back in. Each time these rows happened they seemed to take something away which could never again be recaptured.

She only felt that something of her which was young and alive and loving and ambitious was being slowly but surely stifled; that love itself shrank and quivered at times, and was driven back on itself; that the open door of her outlook on a new and wonderful world was slowly closing, shutting out all the sunshine and the flowers that are youth's heritage.

Was it only the atmosphere of the house? Then, when she had a home of her very own, this feeling would surely pass.

But would it? She would not face the thought. She pushed it away from her, for of course everything would be all right when she had her own home and was away from the gloomy environment of Glenside.

She left the basket on the table and went to the window. She stared out at the roofs. How alike they all were, these houses, these roofs, one after the other, set side by side in monotonous regularity! She would have to live in one something similar—perhaps in this very street.

She drew down the blind because the monotonous, uninteresting, uninviting view hurt and repelled her.

"If only one could draw a blind over one's mind," she whispered.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LURE O' THE ROAD

*. . . All the merry mad loves
That I might have had,
. . . they rise up with cymbals,
Making me sad.*

JOHN MCCLURE.

CHRISTINA was lighting the two brass candlesticks that stood on the kitchen mantelpiece. It was part of the ritual of evening, a sign that the clock had struck the hour of nine.

She placed them precisely on the table, and set the great Bible in place and beside it her father's spectacles.

Eltrym went downstairs as the tall old clock in the hall asthmatically chimed the hour. She took her accustomed place in the chair by the window.

Outside the earth was resting. The roses bordering the strip of lawn were pouring all their sweetness out to the night. Their fragrance came into the room through the open window. The air blew fresh and cool on her hot face. Her father-in-law was coming down the stairs slowly, exact to the minute. At a quarter past nine each night the Book was opened and the reading began.

It was at night that Weariness came out of its hiding-place and crouched by Eltrym. It was something very real, very present at times, waiting as if ready to spring, to beat her to the earth. She closed her eyes as the old man began and tried not to think. To-night his words passed by, meaningless and vague, as words swept on the wind. She found herself striving to shut out from her mind the room and all it con-

tained. Yet why? Had it not always seemed the pleasantest room in the house?

But to-night trivial things weighed on her; for instance, the way her father-in-law sat in his place, adjusting his chair to the one and only angle, and how he took out his handkerchief and loudly trumpeted with it.

Though her eyes were closed she knew that he was polishing his glasses, though Christina had already done that for him. But it was all part of the formal routine even to the flicker of the handkerchief across the Bible, in a quest for invisible dust ere he opened it.

He had always done that. He always would do it. Then, as Sandy would remark, why worry over it?

Christina, she knew, sat by the table, her hands, empty of their knitting for once, clasped on the green cloth. In the wavering candlelight her strong, stern features would be thrown in unrelenting silhouette against the wall-paper. Over her head frowned some family portraits.

The old man was reading aloud, turning his thoughts to sin and death and judgment.

Once she had seen these things with a child's terrified imagination, had visioned horror piled on horror, heard even the shrieks of the damned as they writhed in their relentless hell. Now she was queerly dull and indifferent to such things. By these very horrors they had unknowingly turned her against God in her childhood, shunting her away from Him, and causing her to look over her shoulder in the dark places in fear lest His burning all-searching eyes were upon her. Hence she had courageously avowed that if she personally did not believe God was an entirely different Being from these blasphemous ideals she would not have believed in Him at all.

In the daughter-in-law of a respected and extremely orthodox Elder of the Kirk this was rank blasphemy. Christina naturally drew herself apart from such a confessed sinner and heretic.

Save for that husky monotonous voice Glenside was

eerily silent. Even the old man in his corner slept on as if the passing summer were taking him drowsily with it. Eltrym looked at him once and then quickly and pitifully averted her gaze. He was growing thinner and weaker and more garrulous every day. The end could not be far off. It would be strange, that empty corner by the chimney-piece of which his queer white face and bright beady eyes seemed part. She thought she would always see him there, with his withered yellow hands clawing at his coat. A shudder crept over her.

Outside, by the door, the dog whimpered in a lonely way. He was a mongrel that passed most of his existence in an ancient kennel and was tolerated because he was a good watch-dog. He was not allowed into the house for fear he scratched or muddied the polished floors or left fleas on the carpet.

He was a singular animal, and when the baby tumbled on the lawn he dragged at his chain and gave short ecstatic barks or watched it with big pathetic eyes.

But at Glenside there was a kennel for a dog, and, as everyone knew, a kennel was a proper place for a dog. If it were chained up it would not wander about and be a nuisance to one's neighbours, and old Mr. Mackinnon believed in treating his neighbours as he expected them to treat him.

Eltrym sat, thinking, thinking. Oh, if the shuttle of her brain would not race so untiringly, thought flying after thought, bringing her now a picture of the Cobbler against a sky of stars, now the glimmer of Loch Fyne, now the wide free fields! She wandered, too, and fell a-dreaming. She saw herself a little girl once more in a ragged red shawl and tartan skirt that was too short for her.

When she opened her eyes, a strong desire to laugh came over her when she looked down at her lilac dress which, in Christina's eyes at least, had consigned her to perdition.

Her fingers played unconsciously with one of the frills, then she became aware that Christina's pale eyes

were watching her indignantly. Had she no decency whatever, they seemed to say? Truly, indeed, for all the presence of the Bible in the room, the devil went forth whispering of the things of the world. Christina sighed resignedly.

Now the old man was rising for a blessing on that house. His small congregation—excepting the sleeping, queerly-snoring grandfather, with his head already on his breast—bowed their heads.

In an instant Eltrym was wandering along Bald Gourie moors again.

Then the Book was shut and the old man took up one of the candles to light him upstairs.

Always at nine-thirty the gas of the house was shut off at the meter, and at ten the last light died from behind the window-blinds.

Christina was rousing her grandfather, and he became very querulous and suspicious. He was a poor old man, he quavered, and they were trying to rob him of his money. He had heaps and heaps hidden away, he chuckled; heaps and heaps, under his bed, but no one else besides himself knew where to find these riches. At last he went happily upstairs to search for them, leaning on Christina, but almost before he reached his room he fell asleep again.

Then the house was quiet. The candle still burned on the table, waiting for Sandy who could not be much longer, and Eltrym sat and waited.

The baby was sleeping very soundly to-night, a bad portent for the earlier hours of the morning.

The candle began to burn down. Sandy was later than usual. Outside the door the dog whimpered and rattled its chain. Once she thought she heard the baby moan in its sleep, and immediately tiptoed upstairs. But though it moved restlessly as, shading the light with her hand, she bent over it, it did not wake.

The little face was flushed, the cheeks hot to the touch. She was vaguely aware that babies were like that when teething. Christina had said so, Sandy had said so, and his father had gone into detail over the various

ailments of his weans. She would like to have taken the wee morsel up and hugged it and murmured over it, but that would be madness. Had not Sandy lectured her severely on her disposition to spoil children? He would not have his son utterly spoiled, he said. She sighed and went downstairs again. The dog heard her and whined. She stole softly to the door and, noiselessly drawing back the bars, opened it. She spoke gently and patted the creature's head as it leaped and fawned on her.

"Now, now, Jock! Down, Jock, or they'll hear you and there *will* be a row then! Naughty dog, you've broken your chain. We, you and I, must not break our chains."

She looked up at the sky and saw that it was milky with stars. They twinkled and flashed like messages flung vainly to the unheeding world of the Earth. They brought her the old friendly, intimate feeling of companionship and understanding.

She stood there, the dog rubbing his head affectionately against her skirt. A rising wind betokened change, and it blew against her face and ruffled her hair. She thought of the wind that whirled over Bald Gourie, how all the winds of the world careered by, shouting and skirling noisily, hurling forth defiance. But here, in this street of sedate houses, it went more quietly, though it called her just the same, speaking to her of green and open spaces, bonnie bits of the world. It tugged at her with never-resting hands.

She turned her head and listened. There was no sound in the house. No footsteps echoed in the street without. As if following her thoughts the dog jumped up and put its paws on her knee, begging for freedom.

"And why not?" said Eltrym, and she closed the door quietly behind her and set the dog loose. It scampered to the gate and then back to her as if begging her to follow. It had an uncanny sense that it must not bark.

"Two's company," it seemed to say to her. "Come along! Break *your* chain, too, and open the gate!"

She shut the door to with a quiet click, went guiltily along the pathway and, at the gate, stood and glanced up at Christina's window.

Even as she looked the light went out. Eltrym slipped out of the gate with a sigh of relief.

The Green was near at hand—an open space at the far end of the street. Even there she saw no sign of Sandy. The world seemed asleep.

The house dropped like a burden from her shoulders, she went on and on, the dog racing by her, barking joyously. She romped along with it, yielding herself up to the sheer joy of freedom.

The Green loomed dark against the stars. In the distance she could hear a group of lads. Their voices rose loudly and quarrelsome in dispute. Because she was tired to death of argument she went back.

They took a new and longer way, the dog and she, frolicking together down a deserted space, but promptly decorous if a policeman or homeward-bound folk hove in sight. She walked more slowly as she came within view of the street which Glenside graced with its austere presence.

Save for a light here and there it was gloomy, silent as the grave. She returned by the back way, because the dog had to be let in ever so quietly. She spoke to him on this point, and his very manner as he crept nearer the house showed that he agreed.

They might never have this forbidden hour again, he and she. She laughed softly as she thought he would perchance dream of it and bark joyously in his sleep. Oh, to let him loose on Bald Gourie hills, grim and bare though they were! They crept inside the gate like two criminals fearing detection.

The dog wagged his tail, licked her hand, then in response to her whispered commands went obediently into his kennel. But he could not resist one short, long pent up bark of delirious delight in the escapade.

The door opened and a light wavered on the path. Sandy stood in the doorway, the candle in his hand. Her

heart trembled suddenly. She had been longer than she thought.

He stood blocking the way, a figure of judgment. He spoke curtly, demanding rather than asking instant reply :

"Where on earth have you been ? "

She answered with a sullen sense of resentment at his manner :

"For a walk."

"At this hour and alone ? You must be mad ! "

"I took the dog wi' me."

"That damned mongrel ! " said Sandy more scornfully than elegantly.

A window above their heads flew up and Christina's voice said acidly :

"There's no need to be wakin' the neighbours and advertisin' your business to them ! "

It shut down again with a bang which, being interpreted, meant that this had hitherto been a respectable, God-fearing and law-abiding neighbourhood.

Sandy stood aside, his lips compressed in a straight line, and his wife walked indoors.

"Really, Eltrym," Sandy began, "it's time ye had some sense. You surely ought to know that no respectable woman goes careering around the streets at this hour. Why, it's nearly eleven o'clock. Where on earth have you been ? "

"I only went as far as the Green."

"The Green ! At eleven o'clock at night ! " He stared at her. They stood facing like wrestlers ready for the fray, then Sandy shrugged his shoulders as if the matter were beyond him. Bolting the front door he left her to follow him upstairs or stay below.

She was nervous of the dark in this house, but she remained. She sat on a kitchen chair and stared into the darkness. That queer feeling of hatred of Sandy and all belonging to him came over her.

Sandy turned at the bedroom door to close it behind his erring wife in order to continue the subject in the privacy of their room. He was determined to thrash the

matter out, to have an end once and for all of this nonsense. He became aware that she had deliberately remained downstairs. He knew she was frightened, that she would be sitting there quaking.

"Let her stay!" he said to himself hotly. "It serves her right." He had had a bad half-hour before she came home.

He got into his pyjamas and crept into bed. Still she did not come, and as he lay awake listening for her footsteps his anger receded. As he thought of her sitting downstairs in the dark—she was a delicate creature, after all—a wave of tenderness swept over him.

He rose, went to the door, and called her softly. No voice answered, and something like panic came over Sandy. The house was so still, so uncannily quiet.

He pattered softly downstairs in his stockinged feet. Against the faint blur of the window he discerned a dark shape. He stopped on the threshold.

"Eltrym!"

She had fallen asleep, and she woke with a start, a sudden, sharp cry. In a moment Sandy was by her, angry still, maybe, but reassuring, someone to lean on.

He half carried her upstairs into their room. She sat down on the horsehair chair, and passed one hand wearily over her eyes.

"I believe I must have fallen asleep," she said.

Sandy helped her to undress, Sandy in a stern silence, for unfortunately he did not forget easily. It was his worst fault, and one that was soon well-nigh to wreck his life, that he remembered at unexpected moments and made no bones about telling what he did remember.

But to-night there was something so ineffably weary and helpless about his wife that tenderness had its way with him. The tragedy of it was that perhaps with the morrow remembrance would come again, bitter with overbrooding.

She fell asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow.

Sandy methodically put her boots and his own out-

side the door for the pale ghost of the scullery to tumble over in the morning.

This habit of leaving the boots outside the door was, it may be confessed, sternly disapproved of by his father, who boasted that he would ask no woman to clean his boots for him. So he cleaned them himself, not, however, without a stereotyped sermon on the fact.

Sandy hung up Eltrym's dress in the wardrobe. It was the pretty lilac gown that had cost a monstrous number of shillings, apart from the fact that it was not at all sensible, like winsey, or homespun, or washing linen. But though he glanced at it with disfavour he remembered that his wife had looked astonishingly pretty in it.

She was pretty now, with her tumbled, unbrushed hair in a golden tangle against the pillow, the tears glinting on her long dark lashes.

Sandy crept into bed and drew the coverlet over them both. He sighed. He was for turning his back as a sign of his rigid disapproval.

Then he wavered. He slipped his arm under the shining head and drew it on to his shoulder.

She partially opened her eyes and half whispered, half sobbed drowsily, "Sandy——"

Her hand clutched at him as if for something sure in a shifting world. Her head slipped back on his broad shoulder. He bent his face until his cheek touched hers.

So they slept.

CHAPTER XIV

ELTRYM BEGINS TO WRITE

*. . . We are tired, my heart and I,
We sit beside the headstone thus,
And wish that name was carved for us.*

E. B. BROWNING.

DOWN in the hall the old clock struck, slowly and with much preparatory creaking and muttering, the hour of five.

Eltrym lay awake—she had been awake for more than an hour—and watched the glimmer of the dawn against the window-blind. She had found herself doing that, apparently without reason, for many mornings, and always with the waking there hung over her an overwhelming sense of loss and depression as if, in dreams she could not remember, she had walked in sunless sombre valleys and the gloom of night followed her to the very verge of day.

She sat up, leaning on one elbow and facing the window in perplexity. She had moved quietly so as not to disturb Sandy, who was sleeping soundly, his curly head black against the pillows. His broad chest rose and fell rhythmically.

She turned and looked at him, and it was as if for the first time, as if her eyes were scrutinising a stranger, someone she had never really known.

How strange a thing marriage seemed in this grey, depression-steeped hour of waking that was becoming all too familiar! How strange and empty of meaning! All at once it came to her that marriage meant, whether one would or no, the living together of two people over whom a minister had pronounced a few words; the living together for years and years of herself and Sandy,

of separate aims, perhaps, and conflicting interests, yet going down the road of life together to the end. How queer it seemed in the grey eerie dawn! How one shrank from the thought!

Rain began to spatter fitfully against the pane. A gust of wind rattled the casement. Summer was going, and the breath of autumn went by the window ineffably sad, as are all things that bespeak death and decay.

She looked at Sandy, and, suddenly, in the weight of depression that lay heavy on her soul, it seemed that autumn, too, was entering her heart, that the leaves of love were slowly dying, turning from their young living green of the first year of marriage to russet and dead flame.

Her mind wandered wearily back over the road they had travelled together. Short as it was, it was already piled with stones from the broken masonry of dreams.

The lover had given place to the husband, the husband to the father and provider of the household. Sandy brought her no flowers, no gift of roses, as on that morning when she had looked down from the farm window. Once she had asked him to do so, in the time of daffodils when their gold trembled on the grey streets, still darkly wet with the first warm rains of spring, and he had said shortly :

"D'ye know the price of them?" and then : "It's a good thing I keep the purse, Eltrym. You would be a rare one for wasting money. What do you want the daffodils for?"

She had found then that she could not tell Sandy what they meant to her, how she had ached to hold them against her face for just one moment, how their shining in this grey, still house would have lit the days in which they lingered with her.

For Sandy would have deemed her mad had she explained these thoughts. He would not have understood. As she lay there, in the rainy, windy dawn, she knew that Sandy never would understand. The

knowledge set her heart aching in a dull, passionless way. There were so many, many things that Sandy would not try to understand.

He would have been the first to combat that notion fiercely. He would have added that no one took the trouble to understand *him* or what *he* thought. It did not matter about *him* at all, of course!

She sighed wearily. How grey life was, like the haggard dawn whose pallid light brooded in the room! Words weaved their way into her mind, and began to form rhymes, aimless, meandering at first, then with a thread of something warm and rich and red like the sun. With a start she found that it was a song of love that the words were weaving.

Love! It was love she supposed that existed between herself and Sandy—love that had given her meals and bed and home, and the gift of a little child—love that had given her faithfulness, for at least Sandy was faithful. He boasted of it with the triumphant air of one completely satisfied with this virtue, which was apparently due to the strength of mind of one above and beyond his fellows.

"Ye don't know *all* men," he had said more than once, nodding his head wisely. "I tell you you have the mind of a child. You are very ignorant of life. You have got one of the best husbands in the whole of Paisley if you only knew it!"

Other women envied her, she knew. Had they not said so? Her young comely neighbour of the shopping episode who lived opposite had said to her:

"Ye can set the clock by him. To the very meenute in the mornin' he opens the gate tae gae oot, at the very meenute at nicht he opens it tae come in. Yon's a guid husband, Mrs. Mackinnon. Ye maun be main proud o' him. Never a drop o' drink wi' him. That's temperance, is it no? I wish there were mair like him on the Clyde!"

"He thinks that to drink is sheer waste of good money. It was a pride of the Mackinnon family that a drop of drink never crossed their threshold."

"Weel, I'll no be saying he's no richt! My man could tak' a leaf oot o' his book; he could that. Mind ye, I sometimes think, if you could wink at their weakness, that a drappie o't does mak' them mair human in ways, mair sociable-like. No but that your husband, Mrs. Mackinnon, has always the cheery word to a neebor in passin'."

So the world was agreed that she had much to be thankful for. Why, then, lie aweary in this dowie hour and ponder aimlessly and futilely? Why hark back so often to the days when she tended sheep in the rock-strewn fields of Bald Gourie?

Those had been lonely days, if she persisted in recalling them, foolish days of a small girl whose head was crammed with impossible dreams.

Life in reality was, instead, a busy thing that carried one irresistibly onwards from day to day. This queer distaste of the coming day would pass, as it had passed before.

She slipped down into bed again and drew the coverlet over her head to shut out the dawn and greyer thoughts. She tried to sleep, but sleep would not come; instead, the songs went by her of different dreaming dawns, of fields transfigured in the glory of the sunset, of the sheep moving slowly on against a mist, and then out to a crocus-coloured flood of sunlight.

Oh, those dreams! How they sang their way through her brain, sang of far roads and flashing water and tall trees whispering to the stars!

She tried to forget them and to think, incongruously enough, that soon the milk for baby's bottle would need heating, and that presently the scullery ghost, grey like the hour before the dawn, would slip-slap up the stairs and say in her sing-song voice, "Mister Sandy Mackinnon, it's seven o'clock!" "Miss Christina Mackinnon, it's seven o'clock!" and drift down the stairs as she had come up.

But the songs went joyously by, unheeding these things. They laughed and rippled and flowed, danced past on sun-yellow roads, past rose-covered cottages

and fields of daffodils, blowing wild and free, wild and free——

“Mister Sandy Mackinnon !” wailed the dreary voice at the door, and Sandy woke and yawned widely and tossed the clothes from him and, incidentally, from his bedmate.

He sprang out with the air of one who will not give way to the temptation of a few minutes more in the cosiness of a feather bed. That weakness Sandy disdained. He was strong in these things, and condemned such weakness in his wife.

He thought his wife asleep, for she did not move. He went cheerfully into the bathroom. She heard the sound of running water, cold and clear, for Sandy scorned hot baths as another sign of the weakness of the flesh. He would have his cold bath even in winter, and perhaps his physical hardiness accounted for some of his mental severity.

He was splashing now, and a few seconds later rubbing himself into a brisk glow. And as he rubbed he bawled with more cheerfulness than musical exactitude :

“Mona, my true love—
Mona, my own love—
Art thou not mine for the long years to be-ee? ”

Or he would vary this effusion occasionally with something of a higher class :

“ Oh ! I’ll tak’ the high road
An’ you’ll tak’ the low road,
And I’ll be in Scotland afore ye,
But me and my true love
Will never meet again——”

He broke off abruptly and poked his head in at the bedroom door.

“Now, who has shifted my razor?” he demanded threateningly.

His wife, still in her nightdress, was heating the

baby's milk over the spluttering oil-lamp. She turned her head.

"It must be there, Sandy——"

"But it isn't, I tell you! Would I have come here looking for it if I had? Really, Eltrym, you do ask the most stupid questions."

She pushed the heavy wave of hair back from her forehead.

"Perhaps your father put it away by mistake in his own cabinet."

"He wouldna do that!" Sandy fumed. "He has his ain razor. Someone *must* have taken it! It couldn't have walked off by itself."

"Perhaps Mysie has been cutting her corn with it. She said yesterday that her corn was troubling her——"

"Deil tak' it, woman!" cried Sandy. "Do you mean that you deliberately let her have my razor—that you allowed her to cut her corns with *my* razor?"

His father's door opened. A placid voice demanded:

"Is it your razor ye are wantin', son? I took mine to be ground yesterday, and I borrowed yours. Ye'll find it i' my cabinet, safe an' soond, Sandy. Ay, but ye're a terrible man to work yoursel' into a fluster——"

The door shut, and Eltrym straightened herself and drew up the blind in silence. The grey, wet skies frowned hostilely at her. She stood there so long that the milk bubbled and boiled over.

Sandy, who had re-entered the room, grunted with the air of one who knew that that was just the sort of thing that would happen. He began to grumble about the weather as he hurriedly laced his boots; and he grumbled, too, about Mysie, who had called him fifteen minutes later than usual, and so upset his methodical habits. She apparently had deranged all the plans of his whole day as well. He would have to hurry through breakfast, rush down the street, and perhaps miss his tram, and have to catch the next, and it was a bad thing for discipline that an assistant master should be late.

At last he clattered downstairs and into the kitchen. She heard him call sharply:

"Mysie!"

Christina was in a grumbling mood as well, and, ten to one, Mysie, that pallid prop of the household, would burst into tears over the porridge-pot or burn the toast, and everybody would be in the worst of tempers.

Eltrym sighed as she gave the baby its bottle and threw open the window for air, and turned back the bedclothes. She would have gone downstairs herself and helped, but that Christina would resent it: Once before she had remarked: "I'll ask for help when I'm wantin' it!"

Eltrym went into the bathroom and brought back the baby's tub and set it on the hearth. The baby always must have its bath before she had her breakfast; that was an understood thing.

The child lay on a blanket on the hearthrug and stared up at her, its fist to its mouth. It watched her with its wise old-young eyes and gurgled.

It was astonishingly like Sandy, this small Mac-kinnon. It had a similar nose, slightly stubbed at the end, similar definite lines of mouth and chin, and at times it exhibited a temper that could only have been derived from Sandy.

As she put the little thing in the tub it began to cry fretfully, and she wondered whether it would grow up like Sandy, subject to gusts of temper, to irritable moods.

But she reasoned that environment must have had much to do with the making of Sandy. His delicate mother had spoiled him; his father, over-stern, had determined to crush any budding signs of frivolity.

As she lifted her son on to her knee and dried him with the soft white towels, Eltrym laid her face against the rose-flushed cheek and whispered, half pleadingly:

"But it will be different, surely, with you, my wee bairn! You will have happier, brighter times in the new house—you will be mother's guid bairn, will ye no?"

The child regarded her solemnly with wide, unwinking eyes, almost uncanny in their wisdom. Perhaps

those eyes, young as they were, saw already beyond the veil of the future. Perhaps it was well for Eltrym Mackinnon that day that those baby lips could not speak, and foretell destiny.

Sandy swung into the room and out again, stopping just long enough to grab a book he had forgotten, to bend down and touch his baby's cheek with one finger.

His lips brushed his wife's forehead, and then he was away for the day. The door banged behind him, then the gate. He began to whistle cheerily of the "Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond" as he went down the street.

He would not be late for that particular tram, after all. His porridge had been boiled to a turn, the toast was crisp and brown, the butter fresh from the stores. The rain, too, had stopped, and there was a possibility it might hold off for good.

There was the grey sky, of course—but Sandy was too busy and practical a citizen nowadays to worry about such things as skies, as long as they didn't rain unseasonably. There was probably a subconscious sense of injury that the gods of rain and storm should not pay greater heed to the comfort and the convenience of the Mackinnons.

He went cheerfully on his way, expanding his chest and inhaling deep breaths of fresh air.

The dreary maid slip-slapped upstairs again, and poked her untidy head round the door. Her mistress, the baby in her arms, was looking, apparently vacantly, out of the window at nothingness. Her pale pink blouse and her shining hair made colour and light against the greyness.

"Miss Christina's compliments, and wull ye be so guid as tae come doon afore the tea is cauld?"

Then she dropped her voice cautiously.

"Is the wean worrying ye? I'll tak' him frae ye. He'll be frettin' the noo wi' his teethin'. I hae made a drap o' fresh tea for yersel' in a wee pot."

Eltrym gave the baby to her, because she knew how this poor creature crooned over it and loved it. Maternity

still glowed like a dying fire in the scant breasts and lack-lustre eyes of Mysie, that lit now as she took the babe.

"My bonnie wee bairn—my canny wee thing!" she warbled; then, over her scraggy work-stooped shoulder, "Ye'll shut the door, mebbe, for I'm no doon the stairs the noo."

Eltrym nodded, and smiled back at her in understanding.

The pallid creature's eyes followed that lithe young form, the shining head, until it had gone from sight. She as silently adored young Mistress Mackinnon as she feared and blindly obeyed Christina.

For this stolen moment with the bairn she emerged out of her wraithlike shell into something human, something alive. By and by, and all too soon, she would slip back again into the general greyness, part of the shadows of the house.

The songs went with Eltrym all that morning. They haunted her throughout the minor duties that took up most of her time. While she sewed or mended, or tended her baby, rhymes ran through her mind, over and over again.

At last, when the baby slept in the afternoon, she went to the door and listened. A faint click-click came from downstairs, the shining knitting-needles were flashing in and out for a stocking, or shawl, or muffler.

Eltrym drew a breath of relief and closed the door ever so softly. Then she went to the bureau, and, hunting under a pile of neatly folded underwear, redolent of dried lavender, drew out something else she had bought on that day when the lilac frock had sown in her seemingly undisciplined heart the seeds of rebellion against all the unwritten law and order of her small world.

But it was neither a Paris hat, nor Viennese scarf, nor Renaissance lace, which the shop window had displayed, that Eltrym had bought that day. Indeed, it was a thing that had doubtless escaped the great majority

of those bargain-excited eyes that peered in at the big shop-windows of Messrs. Graham & Murray.

But Eltrym had seen this thing first of all—a large manuscript book, folio size, which the ticket announced as “part of a job lot, especially suitable for clergymen and authors.” At one shilling, which was the magnificent sum asked for it, it was undoubtedly a “special line.”

When you have already broken the laws of the Medes and Persians, and, incidentally, those of Elders of the Scots Kirk, by deliberately allowing your soul to be dazzled by a frilled lace frock of the hue of first Neapolitan violets, and when you have succeeded in fixing your mind to the fact that fifty shillings is a fortune not to be riotously squandered all at once—well, a mere shilling for “this greatest bargain in Paisley,” expressly adapted for the use of clergymen, authors, and would-be authors, is but a bagatelle. And what, I would ask you, would twopence extra matter when one was shown an indelible pencil, “up to date and of the first quality,” warranted as the correct thing for the aforesaid parsons and writers of books?

I am not sure that Eltrym, being very young, did not assure the shop-assistant earnestly that she was not a clergyman, but an aspirant towards authorship. Anyhow, when a neighbour managed to emerge alive from the tumbling horde of women who surged around all that was mortal of the bargain-blouse counter, the salesman was advising young Mrs. Mackinnon to read Neil Munro and John Buchan and Ian Hay.

He had forgotten all about his pencils and his special line of manuscript books, and even the frequent caressing of his waxed moustache—a procedure which is necessary to the art and true deportment of shopwalking,—for young Mrs. Mackinnon, with her flushed face and starry eyes, was looking younger than ever, more like an eager schoolgirl, indeed, than the wife of Sandy Mackinnon and the mother of a sturdy, if fretful, boy of eight months.

The neighbour was wrathful because, though her

hat was askew and her hair all tossed, and her blouse almost torn off her back, she had not managed to get the bargain she wanted. They had all gone, it seemed, before she arrived, as is the way with bargains, even if you are the very first of a queue, and on the doorstep before the shop opens. Nobody, least of all the haughtily suspicious, modern type of shop-assistant, has ever been able to explain this mystery.

The neighbour voiced her grievance to the salesman, who immediately and with bewildering rapidity became a puppet on a string, suavely stern and yet deferentially soothing of voice and manner, while Neil Munro and Ian Hay and John Buchan disappeared into thin air.

Mrs. Mackinnon went out in the trail of an indignant and voluble bargain-hunter, who had not found the bargain of all bargains she had come seeking. The neighbour's grievances filled the train all the way home. She spoke darkly and at length of the condition Paisley was coming to! The Town Council should certainly look into matters. She knew a woman who knew a man whose friend knew the provost. She would write to him and tell him it was part of his duties to see that when shops offered bargains and advertised them as such, bargains there should be.

She had gone out with heart beating high with expectation, arrayed in a perfectly fresh and well-laundered blouse, and now she was coming home with the latter, to use her own description, hanging in tatters from her back, and with a head that ached and clumped like a steam-hammer working overtime. And all because Graham & Murray published tarradiddles in the newspapers!

But these things had passed Eltrym by. In a parcel under her arm was the adorable pale lilac frock, but it was not that which made her eyes shine like stars and her lips quiver with excitement.

For it was of the manuscript book she was thinking, with its long, beautifully ruled sheets of foolscap. And not only that, but, wonder of wonders, the salesman, who had been most wonderfully kind indeed, and had

even in the end told her how long he had been with the firm, and intended one day starting in business for himself, told her that he knew of a man, a friend of his brother's friend from Paisley, who had gone from Paisley to London to do some literary work in the firm of Findlay and Anderson.

The man from Paisley turned out to be in the printing department, but that was of no moment beside the fact that the shopman had said loftily :

"Of course, ye ken auld Mr. Anderson. He built a big place by Strachur, all turrets and whirligigs and redness and what-no. He died, and his son is carrying on the business, and pleased he is to have the talent o' Paisley in his service. They say that already he is as guid a man at the bukes as his faither before him."

She meant to tell him that she had met the son, but some of her Bald Gourie shyness came back and made her flushed and tongue-tied.

The neighbour had come up then, and there it ended, and the salesman had become an automaton, a kind of human sign-post :—

"Yes, Madam. First to the right, Madam. Second floor, Madam."

But Eltrym had gone home with the manuscript book tight under her arm. Even the glory of the lilac frock paled before it.

She had gone home to a teething baby, crying fretfully, and she had laid the book away amid the lavender bags in the underlinen drawer to await a more favourable opportunity.

She meant to tell Sandy about it, to voice the thoughts and the dreams that raced through her mind.

Oh, she had been so happy, so laughing-happy, until she came downstairs in the lilac frock and out into the sunshine, and there the shadow of the house and its inmates fell across her heart and drove out the laughter.

And now for the first time since that day, she had opened the manuscript book, had taken the fine gilt top off the sharpened ink-pencil and screwed it on to the bottom.

She did not know just when it was she started to write. The pencil lifted of itself, following the songs—the lilting, laughing songs of youth that are made for joy and happy lovers, and the glory of countless roses.

Then suddenly the gate clicked, and Sandy's voice echoed from the pathway without as he paused to watch his father digging the garden.

Sandy home! The baby not undressed or fed! Look at the hour!

In a panic, as she heard his step on the stairs, she thrust the book and pencil out of sight, and, in that moment, in the expression on her face, in its bewildered fear, half terror as to what Sandy would think, she was very like the yellow-haired child who, years ago, hid her queer toys in the old grandfather clock in the croft house.

CHAPTER XV

CLOUDS IN THE SKY

*Lovers and lovers pass
Across the little grass,
But where are you and I?
Not even our ghosts go by.*

L. WOODSWORTH REESE.

THE fire in the shining kitchen grate danced and crackled cheerily. In its warmth the old man in the corner had drifted into sleep. Save for his fitful snoring the house was still.

These last autumnal days had swung in suddenly with a sharp frost that had set the branches of the trees snapping and crackling, and in a day or two the russet and yellow leaves would be swirling here, there and everywhere before the broom of the wind.

Eltrym came slowly down the staircase. She was thinner and more fragile in appearance lately, and shivered with cold as she went into the kitchen.

She stood before the black cavern of the chimney, watching unseeingly the flickering points of light on the emery-polished steel fittings. On the wall, behind the old man, a grotesque giant shadow of a head wavered and gibbered and nodded.

She tucked the rug gently and closely about the pitifully shrunken figure. He was going swiftly and surely as the autumn leaves which, shrivelled and twisted on skeleton branches, waited but for a touch of rude Boreas.

The house was very quiet. Even Christina's knitting-needles were silent. Christina herself had hurried down the road, all sails set, like an ancient war-frigate ready for action.

The grocer had made a mistake in the accounts, paid with regularity each week, and the mistake, as is the tradesman's way, was to his own good and not Christina's.

She had gone forth with a declaration of war on him and all his kind, the faded flowers in her hat nodding in righteous anger, her black satin bag clutched tightly in her neatly gloved hands, as if perchance even the Paisley trams might be full of grocers with treacherous memories.

Christina carried an umbrella because it was always, rain or sun, as much part of her attire as her hat or her primly laced boots.

In the scullery Mysie, taking ample advantage of such rare absence of authority, was poring over a yellow-covered threepenny novelette in which a housemaid, after many vicissitudes, naturally became a duchess.

She poked her head cautiously around the scullery door as Eltrym came in. She had red rims to her eyes and sniffed audibly.

Eltrym turned her head at the sound :

"Why are ye greeting, Mysie? Have ye the toothache again?"

The dreary one shook her head and held up the novelette.

"It's an awfu' sad story, Mistress Mackinnon!"

Eltrym smiled gently.

"It winna be always like that—all the time."

"Och ay! I'm thinkin' that. But there's a bad lord after her the day, and I'm feared he will be havin' his way wi' her. He has lockit her in a tower in his muckle but-and-ben, and I'm no seein' how she will be gettin' oot."

Eltrym smiled wistfully.

"But it will all come right in the last chapter." She turned back to the fireplace, staring at its glowing heart. "She will get out all right, Mysie. They always do—in books," she said, and then she sighed and passed her hand across her brow as if to brush back the weight

of her heavy hair. It was an action that had become increasingly familiar, though she was at times quite unconscious she did it.

For weeks life had gone on its usual routine. The baby was fretful again, and there had been another restless night. A day or two before, Sandy, insisting that she was coddling the child and asserting that he now intended to take a firm hand in its upbringing, had taken the child out without the protecting shawl.

Sandy had scorned the shawl. All the child wanted was its coat and gaiters. As a matter of fact, it was, to Sandy's thinking, too warm for even a coat. The day was sunny and shining, one of those bright days that yet have the first treacherous nip of chill in them.

Eltrym had said no more because she was painfully aware that it was futile to have arguments over simple things, especially with Sandy. How she hated the inexplicably swift and apparently reasonless beginning of these domestic differences!

"Oh, of course, *I* know nothing!" from Sandy sarcastically; "naething at all. That's quite understood. A husband's expected to know nothing. And, of course, everything *I* do is wrong. That's understood, too. So let's have no more talk about it."

So the child had gone out on its first triumphant outing as a little man who had shed the wrappings of babyhood, on a round of Sunday afternoon visits to relations. Eltrym had stayed at home because she had a headache.

And Sandy, returning two or three hours later, had been caught in an unexpected shower. To do him justice, he had taken off his coat to put it around the baby. But the mischief had been done.

The child as well as Sandy had caught a cold. It was only a slight thing, seemingly, for each of them. The bairn until last night had, to all intents and purposes, recovered. Then early in the night it had cried hoarsely and fretfully. She had walked the floor with it until dawn.

"I suppose," said Sandy sulkily from among the

bedclothes, "that *I* will get the blame." Of course *I* made the child ill."

She said nothing, but at something in her pale face Sandy got up and insisted on taking the child. But it cried on and on and would not be comforted, so at last he handed it back to her. There had been a breeze, of course, over her protestations that she could manage, and Sandy had muttered himself to sleep.

Now in the early afternoon Eltrym was feeling the strain of those sleepless hours. Her head throbbed and her body ached. She felt stiff and tired, drowsy yet sleepless.

She had tried to rest that afternoon while the baby slept but could not. So she had come downstairs to sit by the fire and darn or make some garments for the baby. She felt thoroughly exhausted, worn out in body and mind. She lay back in a chair, the work unheeded, and watched the fire. In some moods Sandy was strangely like his father and his sister. He had outgrown some of their traditions and prejudices, maybe, but in him their weaknesses were intensified.

How different people could be when one was married to them! Less than two years ago they, Sandy and she, had been so near to each other, had laughed and challenged the world. Nothing was to weigh on them except this business of life which some folk took far too seriously.

And now—she flinched from the topic as always of late. She said to herself that this and no other was the life Fate had destined for her; that she "must march breast forward, never doubting clouds would break."

She must read her poets again. They would be her friends, as on the windy hills of Bald Gourie—and all at once the fire and the room and the grotesque shadows on the wall flickered and died. She was sitting on the lichen-covered rocks by Loch Fyne. The old house jutted out grey and old like the hills; the diamond panes of the croft window caught the sunlight; and against the tiles there shone the glory and the beauty of Jeanie's hair. And Jeanie was in the attic whispering again,

and on the moors with the wind blowing through the purple heather, her plaid shawl whipping about her pale, flower-like face, and she was turning her face to the road, stretching out her arms to it.

"Freedom and fame and love!" Jeanie called out in a queer, choked voice.

Oh, those were dreams that were gone and over, gone and over, Eltrym reflected, as she brushed her hand across her wet eyes and took up her sewing. The needle, ever so slowly at first, plied its way in and out of the white calico.

"Here are a' my dreams now," she said as she stitched for her son. But her mind was still tramping the roads of those old childish visions. The needle went slower and slower. She had sent away a whole bundle of songs for Cecil Anderson to choose from.

She had given the address at Glenside in fear and trembling. If they should come back rejected, she felt she would not mind so much. People sometimes wrote for years, she had heard, before anything was accepted. But she could not bear Sandy to laugh about them, to have to explain why she wrote as Eltrym Hardie, anyway. And, greatly daring, she had sent a poem to the *Paisley Record*, the paper her father-in-law favoured. Needless to say, she had not signed it. But, anyhow, it could not come back as they had no address. By now it would doubtless be reposing in the waste-paper basket at an amused or contemptuous editor's side.

But perhaps he would write a few lines in his paper to the anonymous author. At any rate, she would soon know, for at any moment the paper might slide through the letter-box. Then she started, suddenly awake, for she heard steps on the path.

The denizen of the scullery heard them, too; and, recognising them, stowed the housemaid-soon-to-be-a-duchess behind the copper.

Christina came in, her cheeks flushed with triumph and remembered battle.

"I soon telt him about it, I did! And he was no sae pleased about it, either, for a' he was sae fu' o'

apologees. The shop was half fu', but I gave him my mind. And he said it wouldna happen again, and I assured him that I would help him to keep in *that* raisolution."

This for Christina was as long a speech as her young sister-in-law had heard her utter. She seemed duly impressed by it.

Christina went upstairs to put away her best hat and gloves and take off her boots; and while she was gone footsteps echoed on the garden path again.

Eltrym knew them at once, the cheery whistle that accompanied them, the thud of the paper that fell on the floor. She was down the passage in a twinkling, and picked up the paper.

She brought it into the kitchen, trembling like a leaf, and opened it.

No—yes! There in the far page was—as week after week—a poem, either modern or ancient. She could hardly see to read, and then the mist cleared.

There was her poem, every line of the three verses printed. Her lips parted and her eyes shone. *Her* poem! *Hers*!

The stairs resounded with Christina's tread and Eltrym folded the paper in a panic and laid it on the table. It would have been a breach of Glenside etiquette, as well as of the peace of the household, were it known that any other hand save that of the master first opened it. It was an unwritten law and rigidly adhered to.

She turned back to the fireplace and heard a chuckle. The bright beady eyes of the old man were watching her, with a queer gleam of intelligence in their washed-out depths. The old head nodded at her.

"What's the matter wi' ye noo, grandfaither?" said Christina, who had entered. "Ye seem pleased wi' yersel' the day."

The old man chuckled. His nodding head turned towards Eltrym as she sewed. He chuckled again as if they shared a great secret between them. Perhaps in his poor muddled brain something stirred, as when the

roses blooming outside by the window peered in at him over the sill and brought fragrance and memories.

"Yellow like the sun," he babbled. "Too young—ay—ower young—I sayed that to mysel' I did—oh, an' I was richt—the poor old man was richt and he was sorry, too." Then he began to half chant, half sing in his cracked voice, "Oh, aye. Oh, aye."

"Oh, haud yer wheesht, grandfather," said Christina crossly.

CHAPTER XVI

A POET IN PAISLEY

*. . . hazily in a cloud of amethyst
Drift butterflies above the cabbages.*

MUNA LEE.

THAT night, during the evening meal, Eltrym's father-in-law, wiping the crumbs off his long grey beard, donned his eyeglasses and prepared to read the paper.

Nothing in it was ever likely to miss his shrewd eyes. He scanned even the advertisements, grunting now and again if anything displeased him, reading aloud anything likely to be of interest to his family.

They all sat round the fire engaged in various occupations,—Christina with her knitting; Eltrym with some sewing, one foot on the rocker of the cradle; Sandy with his note-book and pencil, or a novel—at which waste of time his father was apt to read many lectures to deaf ears—on the table.

It was perhaps the most silent hour in the evening, this hour when old grandfather was in bed and baby asleep and the womenfolk were intent on knitting and sewing. Even the maid had ceased from clashing dishes and had slip-slapped up the stairs to her own domain near the roof.

It was at this hour, most of all, that the utter silence of the house was wont to linger, heavy and depressing, about Eltrym. It was as if brooding clouds hung above her head, so near she might reach up and touch them with her hands, though she shrank from doing so lest disaster might befall.

But to-night Eltrym thrilled as she listened and waited. The paper rustled as the father turned it,

folded it and began to scan the more worldly affairs of Paisley, the reports of local balls and dances, school concerts and extracts from Sunday sermons, besides other purely frivolous and trivial topics.

"Hullo! What's this?" he muttered, and both Christina and Sandy lifted their heads.

"You don't mean to say," observed Sandy, "that there's anything of interest in *that* rag?"

"Your sarcasm is lost on me," said his father. "It appears there is a new Bobby Burns i' Paisley, and in our suburb nae doot."

Eltrym still bent her head over her sewing. Her hands trembled, so that the needle pricked her finger and made a red spot on the fine linen.

Sandy laughed indulgently. "Mebbe aye and mebbe no. Let's hear him, anyway."

"I'll read oot what the editor says first," answered the old man triumphantly. "I ken ye are a clever man yersel', son, and mebbe," with a chuckle, "I am nursin' a genius i' my ain house. We never ken, do we, dochter?"

Had any of them looked at Eltrym they would have seen her face go scarlet, and then white. How could the editor have found out? The editor had found out!

But the old man was only having a joke at the expense of his son and his collections of poetry. He settled himself now and began to read aloud:

"The editor has received an anonymous contribution in the form of a poem entitled: 'Ere Love had Shut the Door.' There is a pencilled request for our opinion whether the unknown author has any talent in this way. We desire to emphasise our belief that the poem manifests distinct promise, and we shall be glad to receive further contributions from the same pen."

"Hooray! And on the same terms, nae doot," commented Sandy. "But let's hear the poem."

The old man took an exasperatingly long while to find it. He had to take off his glasses, polish them and, after the ceremony of blowing his nose with a sound like a trumpet-blast, adjust them again in place.

He read it to himself first, grunting here and there.

"I dinna ken what he's talkin' aboot," he said at last. "There's nae Bobbie Burns aboot this, I'm thinkin'. It's a' aboot heather dyin', and curlews flyin' and dusk and a' that sort o' thing. I wadna say he was writin' like Burns, mysel'," he added cautiously.

"Let's hear it," urged Sandy. "What did I tell ye?"

Eltrym's heart was beating almost to suffocation and her needle still shook as it threaded its uncertain way in and out the baby's garment.

"In guid time," said the old man resignedly. "But ye ken I'm no hand at the poetry. And I canna say that I mak' much sense oot o' it——"

Sandy was showing signs of impatience. Eltrym sensed his thoughts. Why did his father hover so about things before doing them?

The thought flashed through her own mind. Oh, if he, Sandy, could only see how alike he and his father were in this respect. If he *would* only see!

The old man began to read as if it were from the Scriptures instead of the paper. There were the same preparatory cough, the due solemnity of expression, the monotonous drone into which his voice had slipped. She did not know whether to laugh or cry as he began:

"O Curlew! Curlew flyin',
Where the purple heather's dyin'
On a' the lonely hillside
And o'er the windswept moor,
Where in the sunny weather
My dear and I together
We were one wi' dawn an' dusk-tide
Ere Love had shut the door."

Her father-in-law paused. "That's a' one vairse," he explained. "I've not read mair than yin vairse, ye ken."

No plaudits filled the room, no sound of clapping hands from a great multitude. The critics looked untouched.

"And quite richt, too, if it's a' like that," said Sandy, more in joke than earnest. "Ye could string that out by the yard, like sausages. Bobby Burns, indeed!"

He began to parody:

"My love and I that awfu' weather
We walked the sodden ways together,
And we talked a lot of blether." . . .

He looked round for his wife's admiration at his own witty improvisation. But she was not smiling. She was folding up her sewing, as if she had not heard, and she looked pale and tired.

"Are ye off to bed?" her father-in-law asked. "It's ower early yet, Eltrym—and prayers have no been said."

They turned and looked at her, and she hesitated:

"I thought I heard baby crying. I'll be down again in a few minutes——" Her voice was uncertain, and she went out of the room without finishing her sentence. Christina sniffed as she resumed her knitting. 'Twas awfu' how her sister-in-law neglected work.

"There's no so much wrong wi' the wean," said Sandy's father, "but over-nursin'. Ye wud soon spoil ony wean i' that way, gangin' up to him almaist before he greets."

She heard Sandy's voice, returning to the poetry. "It's piffle—but," resignedly, "let's have the second verse."

She shut the door of her room and leaned against it for a moment. How tired she was, how tired, how very tired!

And yet she felt as if she could run screaming out of that house, as if she could scream away all the oppressive silence and the depression, all the sneers, and the arguments, and the sarcasm.

They were laughing now at some joke. Perhaps they were laughing over the poem—*her* poem. How dared they laugh at it! How dared they!

She clenched her hands and began to pace up and

down the room. The blinds were yet undrawn and the myriad lights of the town flickered out of the haze of a starry night. A row of lamps rose tier on tier following the line of some hilly street.

How stuffy and airless it was in the room though the night was cold! She pressed her hands to her forehead and found it burning. A fire raged within her.

She looked back over her life, over her marriage, and lo! it was but as dried stubble. The fire raced towards it, fierce and devastating.

Oh, what was she saying? She must not say such things to herself—she must not even think them.

She thrust her folded fists against her mouth to keep herself from crying out, from shrieking, and ran to her baby's cot as if for protection, fighting against hysteria, the almost overwhelming desire to cry and laugh and cry again.

Baby's cheek was hot against her hot cheek. The wee thing slept on, breathing stertorously. Her tears fell on its face unheeded.

She stood lonely and isolated, cut off with no outlet of escape. Even the baby slept on as one without need of her.

The door opened and Sandy came in. He looked at his wife crouched on the window-seat. The window itself was open, and the breeze blew her hair about her face in shining threads as if for spinning. He regarded his wife in astonishment.

"The window open on a night like this! You must be mad. You'll get your death of cold."

She cried quickly, "What does it matter?" The words were hurled against him.

He paused. "Oh, of course it doesn't matter!" he said. "Of course not! It doesn't matter, I suppose, if you get ill and the doctor has to be called in again——"

"Oh, don't let's argue," she said in a weary voice, "don't let's argue again about anything."

"I'm not arguing," Sandy retorted hotly. "It is you who are doing the arguing, but surely I have a

say in my own house. Surely I can speak. I can't say a word but you immediately talk about arguing. *Who's* arguing, *I'd* like to know?"

She said no word. If she had it would have been a pleading cry of, "Don't say any more—don't say any more—only go away and leave me in peace for one moment, just this one moment."

"Father's waiting for you downstairs," said Sandy sulkily. "Everything is ready. He sent me up to tell you."

She rose without a word, and followed him, walking slowly, quite steadily now.

The father, seated at the table, looked significantly at the clock but made no comment.

It was five minutes past the usual time for the reading. He took out his handkerchief, wiped his glasses, and blew his nose with the force and indignation of a just man to whom punctuality is a god, and who has been kept unnecessarily waiting.

But he offered no rebuke, and, without further preliminary, the Word was read and another day had reached a seemly close.

CHAPTER XVII

SANDY LECTURES ON LITERATURE

*It is not fields divide us,
Nor rivers or the sea . . .*
M. P. H.

MR. MACKINNON had gone upstairs, followed later by Christina. A solitary candle was flickering and guttering on the table. In the range the fire burned low, and Sandy, gathering his books and papers together, prepared for departure.

He glanced at his wife, who still lingered, and wondered whether she had been asleep. She had been very quiet indeed. But she was sitting upright in the stiff wooden-backed chair, her hands clasped tensely in her lap. Her eyes watched the last of the fire. Sandy yawned.

"Bed-time!" announced Sandy as he took up the candle.

His wife answered in a curiously detached voice: "Sandy, I would like to speak to you about something."

Sandy raised his eyebrows and looked over his shoulder a little impatiently: "Won't it keep till morning? It's nearly ten o'clock."

Then, as she made no reply, he turned back to her good-humouredly enough.

"Well, what do you want to blether about now? Is it Christina again? Or grandfather? Or a lecture from father?" He yawned again. Then he thought he saw light. His brows met. "Is it any more new dresses you have bought—and stowed away out of sight after one day's wear?"

For the life of him he could not keep that touch of

sarcasm out of his voice. Indeed, he was rather pleased with what he considered a witty and ironic allusion. It would show, anyhow, that though a silent, stern man, of otherwise pleasant disposition, he had not forgotten.

Curiously enough, for she was extremely sensitive, it passed her by. She was looking at the fire as if she had not even heard.

Now she said: "You remember that poem your father read out to-night?"

Sandy grunted, "Oh, *that!*" He yawned widely. "Come on, Eltrym, you surely don't want to stay up all night in order to discuss sentimental piffle like that. Just like a woman!" He began to move towards the door. "Besides, I didn't know you had read the thing. I noticed that you got up and walked out of the room while my father was reading it aloud to us. Not that it was much worth hearing—modern poetry isn't—but it would hurt the old dad your going out like that."

She did not make any protestation of the baby's need or repeat her excuse that she thought she had heard it crying. She spoke very clearly, without any sign of emotion: "I had no need to stay, Sandy. For it was I who wrote it."

Sandy put down the brass-candle on the table. He stared at her.

"*You* wrote it?"

"Yes."

Her voice, low and clear, carried conviction. There was a silence in the room. Overhead, heavy boots creaked slowly and ponderously across one of the bedroom floors. There followed the creak of a chair as the owner sat down heavily. Then the first boot dropped with a dull thud and they waited instinctively for its mate to follow.

"*You* wrote *thae vairses?*" said Sandy again. He was outwardly calm, but it was a sign of inner excitement that he dropped instantly into the vernacular. "You sent them tae the *Record?*"

He looked at his wife as if he would like to inquire, or rather demand the why and wherefore of it.

"Yes."

She spoke in what Sandy was pleased to call, more vigorously than politely since his marriage, "that damned McCrimmon manner."

"And you never said a word about it? You sent it anonymously?" Into his voice crept an injured note. Sullenness would come afterwards. "Why didn't ye tell *me* of all people? Why wasn't *I* considered in the matter, I'd like to know?"

"For one thing, I did not think you would be sufficiently interested, Sandy. You would not, I think even now, have had sufficient faith in anything I might write."

He shrugged his shoulders irritably: "There you go again! I might have known you would say something like that." He gave a sigh of resignation. "Weel, if there's any mair pleasant observations of a like nature ye would like to throw at me, I'm ready for them."

There was none apparently. He stood with his back to the fire, raised his coat-tails and thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"Are they going to give you anything for it?" he asked his wife.

"I don't know."

"You don't know?" Cynically. "Surely if the thing is worth printing, it's worth paying for, isn't it?"

"I never thought of payment, Sandy."

Sandy laughed a short, not very pleasant laugh. He said just one word, but there was a wealth of expression in it:

"Ay!"

He gave an angry jerk of his shoulders, dropped his coat-tails and began to fumble in his pockets for his pipe. It was one of the traditions of Glenside that no one smoked within its portals, and Sandy, who had a strong sense of filial duty, had hitherto conformed to this regulation. But now he lit his pipe and puffed away in grimly contemplative silence.

"Ay!" he said, by and by, "ye wouldn't think o'

that, of course. Money's a thing to be scorned in this hoose."

It was a little while before she spoke. Her hands had clenched more tightly on her lap so that the knuckles showed white beneath the skin. She was looking at the fire still, the fire over which a grey film of ashes was making its way. The embers were darkening, losing their glow and sparkle. Something in her heart was dying slowly with them.

"I thought I would like to talk the matter over with you, Sandy, after—after everybody had gone to bed."

Sandy gave her a single hostile look. "*They*, of course, are to remain as much in the dark as I was, I suppose."

"I do not think they would understand, Sandy. They would think I was—wasting time and ink and paper."

Sandy snorted: "And what else would it be if ye are going to get nothing for it? Ye can please yourself about telling them. Ye look at it from a different point of view. I'm all Scots and I'm straight, and, therefore, I hide nothing."

She was inaccessible to taunts like these to-night, it appeared. In demonstrating principles, Sandy had a habit of using anything in his hand to describe all sorts of gyrations in the air as he spoke. Now he took his pipe from his mouth, pointed the stem directly at her and embarked on a lecture. He had exactly the air of a schoolmaster pointing with his cane at some offender condemned to listen to a recital of misdeeds, and to the following necessary advice from one older and therefore more experienced.

"If there's money in it, all right!" And now the bowl of the pipe glowed at her like an angry eye. "If you can earn money by it, very well! But if not," and the pipe made a very decisive swoop indeed, "why waste your time and make yourself and everybody else miserable over it?"

This was a bomb in the camp.

"But—I want neither to waste my time nor to make

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anyone miserable over it." And Eltrym's lips trembled, for she was beginning again to feel a very little and very naughty child who had incurred its elder's displeasure. Indeed, she had somewhat the look of a small puppy mutely begging not to be thrashed any more. "It really doesn't matter to *me* whether I sell my work or not. I get all the joy out of it by the very ecstasy of creation."

"Stuff and nonsense!" observed Sandy. He puffed contemptuously. "Everybody writes for money now. They'd be fools if they didn't, not that I doubt, if you had asked the editor for money for it, whether he would have printed the poem at all. As it is, he may never accept another. I'm not castin' anything up at ye, mind ye, but my sark wants a couple o' buttons an' I canna help seeing that the darning's been neglected."

She looked down at her hands. They were very quiet. How tired she was, and her head was beginning to ache dully again! For a moment she drifted away, out of the room, out of the house, past the whimpering dog in the kennel.

She came back with a start to the fact that the pipe stem was again making mysterious passes in her direction. The tenor of the conversation had changed.

"Take Arnold Bennett!" Sandy was leaning back against the mantelpiece, bearing himself as a brilliant lecturer on literature and all pertaining thereto. "Take Arnold Bennett! *There's* a man for you! *He* doesn't waste much paper, I'll be bound, nor does he write at all sorts of odd hours. I ken that from a friend. He gets down to it in a proper business fashion."

But this fell on unheeding ears. Her mind went soaring away while Sandy thought her listening intently and appreciative and suitably impressed by the knowledge of what a clever husband she had.

"There you have Bennett's ideas in black and white, cool and concise! You won't catch him wasting his time about poetry. Then there's Wells——"

He launched out into a long debate on the rival merits of Wells and Arnold Bennett. His eyes glowed

with enthusiasm at the epigrams he heard himself flinging forth. Really, there was something in being a good speaker, after all. Look at the avenues open to one! Take Parliament! There you had proof that a brilliant speaker, no matter what other lamentable deficiencies he might suffer from, could command the attention of the House at any time. He could simply make rings round credulous constituents.

Sandy warmed to the topic, which by now had strayed into all sorts of highways and byways and had left Bennett and Wells and Eltrym's poetry stranded high and dry. Farther off still was the shirt minus the two buttons.

That was the worst of Sandy. Like many "men of few words," when he did begin any matter of conversation he developed into far-reaching, one-sided discussion.

Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells had long ago left poor Eltrym feeling like a limp rag clinging to a hedge, and now something in her began silently to moan:

"Oh, *stop!* Stop! *Do stop!*"

But Sandy went on to a triumphant conclusion, bobbing his pipe up and down, making mystical passes and strategical flourishes, and describing a plan of campaign that no one else had ever thought of. He was enjoying hearing himself. School lectures have limits, but it is one of the advantages of marriage that if you have a silently appreciative partner you can go on to the end, happily conscious of the fact that not only are you adding to his or her knowledge, but are keeping yourself in good practice should a career of this nature ever open out before you.

Sandy felt, if only circumstances and environment had been different in his earlier years, he might by now have set the Clyde on fire. He did not know that in the wild, untutored heart of his wife a flame of another kind began to flicker and waver into life. Her head was aching in a dull tortured way. She felt herself slowly wilting like a flower in a room that has grown uncontrollably airless and close. All the strength went out

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of her limbs and she felt old and feeble, old and remote, drifting far away——

Sandy, at the zenith of his oratorical triumph, chanced to turn and saw that his wife's face looked strangely wan and pinched. He stopped abruptly. Parliament and its attendant visions vanished into thin air. He bent over her anxiously because her face was as white as death itself.

"Dearie, what is it?" He was solicitous and kind beyond words. His arm went about her. But she rose and her movement somehow swept him back from her.

"I feel ill," she whispered, "ill and tired."

Before he could help her she reached the door and flung it open. She leaned against the post as if the action had used up the last reserves of her strength.

He brought some water and held it to her lips, but she waved it away. She pulled herself together and stood up straight. Her eyes unclosed. They stared at him very bright and feverish. Then they looked through and beyond him. The stars shone out of a sapphire-dark sky. The wind went by blowing over the garden where the roses had lately bloomed, blowing over the world——

"I want to go out," she said. "I want to go out."

His voice was like a gusty chill rain against her fevered face.

"You'd really be much better in bed," he said practically. "It's madness to go out at this time of night."

She looked at him with eyes bright, enigmatical.

"I am going out," she said.

"At this hour?"

"I am going out," she repeated, and at something in her voice, with a shrug of his shoulders, he ceased remonstrance. Sullenly he brought her a shawl, wrapped it about her, and fetched his own hat.

As they went down the path in silence the dog leaped to her out of the kennel and whined, wagging its tail.

Without a word she bent down and slipped collar and chain from its neck and opened the gate for it to pass out. It raced before them, down the windy trail of the night.

Sandy shrugged his shoulders with the air of one who, by long experience, has become resigned to the ways of womankind, and followed his wife in sulky silence.

CHAPTER XVIII

WARNING

*You called me and I was not near,
You sent my name into the grey
Of empty dusk. I did not hear.
The moment passed—you turned away.*

HORTENSE FLEXNER.

THE wind blew fresh in their faces, chill with the threat of looming winter. In the pearl-clear haze the stars flickered and twinkled and flashed like the mast-lights of ships at sea. On the horizon dark ominous clouds were tumbling and tossing, great galleons climbing up and sailing over the rim of the world. The tall trees fretted and whispered and muttered, like the voices of men talking in sleep.

To these two who walked that night on the road there came faintly and far the tinkle of the bell of some tethered animal, cropping the grass as it moved.

The trees by the burn stood out dark against the sky. Until then Eltrym had not noticed they had walked so far. The tinkle of the bell was like something that called to her across the sleeping night.

She stopped by an old fence that ran by Craigie Burn.

The town lay far behind, the terraces of lights glimmering faintly through a rising ground-mist. Here and there, on the lonely moor beyond the burn, a late lamp shone yellow in some cottage window. The smell of smouldering leaves, of dead heather, still lingered in the air.

The feverish unrest that had hounded her forth raged and burned like a consuming fire in her veins. It had driven her onwards heedless of time or distance or

companionship. Remembrance rushed back upon her now.

She turned her head then and saw, a few yards farther down the brae, a dark motionless figure by the fence. The hunch of the shoulders that showed he was angry, and the fact that those shoulders were deliberately turned to her, proved that it was Sandy. She did not know whether to laugh or cry, or do both as she realised that she had quite forgotten him.

It was so ridiculous to think that they two were standing like that, husband and wife, yards apart, leaning against the same fence and staring wordlessly into the dark ravine of the burn.

The tiny flame of repulsion wavered.

Poor Sandy! He had followed dumbly at her heels all the way. He had not deserted her, like the dog, for instance, who when he came to the moor had gone mad with freedom and rushed on and on into the night. Compunction came into her heart.

"Sandy!"

It was a while before he spoke.

"Well?"

It was certainly a cold and uncompromising beginning.

"Don't you think we had better go back?"

Sandy turned a pale blur of a face to her: "What I think has evidently no weight with you."

Silence.

Then Sandy doggedly: "*You* pleased yourself about coming here. Now *I* will please myself as to when I shall go back."

She could almost see the hardness that crept into his eyes, and the muscles of his face tightening with determination.

Then the pale face vanished as he loftily turned his shoulders upon her.

But silence, blessed though it be at times, cannot endure for ever. They could not stay there all night staring at the black depths of the burn. Soon they would have to wend their weary way to that sombre

house in its decorous, law-abiding street where undue display of any emotion, apart from such unseemly happenings as these night-walks when all respectable people were abed, was as rare as the Seven Deadly Sins.

The thought that she must presently endure another scene, either here or at home, or plod along the road throughout the night, to the accompaniment of reproaches and useless recriminations, filled her with despair and nausea.

Christina would have heard and noted their departure, would have come down to find that they had gone out without locking the door. She would be filled with a just and righteous anger against her brother's wife, holding her, and only her, responsible, though the sharp flail of her wrath would descend on them both.

Christina, in her washed-out pink flannelette nightgown, several inches too short for her, her black woollen bedroom slippers in much evidence, a shawl about her shoulders, would be waiting in the fireless kitchen for their return. The reception when they entered, dogless and tired; the sullen days that would follow, punctuated with acid allusions to the ways of some folk, and wonderings as to what respectable neighbours thought—the mere thought of all this coming annoyance, trivial enough perhaps in itself, made Eltrym physically sick. She shivered as if chilled to the bone. Some of the peace went from out the night.

She drew her shawl about her head and shoulders and went towards Sandy:

"Hadn't we better go home now? Christina will be anxious."

Sandy spoke gruffly but with considerable emphasis: "That's not *my* fault, is it?"

She drew away from him and waited. From far away there came the muffled thud and beat of a train slowing up at Paisley, then throbbing on its way again.

Eltrym spoke quite gently: "Come, Sandy."

He shrugged his shoulders: "You can go if you wish"—his voice was hard as steel—"I stay here."

"Very well."

She did not plead again, but moved off and down the road slowly. She did not look back. The road was darker because of the broken clouds that were floating aimlessly, like boats adrift, among the stars. But far down at the foot of the burnside the light of a lamp-post burned dimly.

Before she reached it she heard steps on the road behind her and sighed. The wild fever had ebbed and left a dull resignation, the flame in her heart had burned itself out almost to ashes.

Sandy caught her up and strode by her. The loose stones stumbled from under their feet and rattled as they went. Sandy took out his watch as they passed the lamp-post.

Had he looked at his wife instead, he would have seen that the tears were running helplessly down her cheeks. But he was too much occupied with other things. He shut the case of his watch with a sharp click:

"Nice time o' night to be returning home."

She scarcely listened to him and they walked in silence.

But Sandy had come to the end of his patience. All the way up the hill he had bottled up his resentment, but as he retraced his steps the whole proceeding seemed so utterly stupid and inexplicable that his wrath broke loose.

For the moment he lost all sense of time and place. He wanted to have *his* say now. He *would* have his say! He had been patient and enduring quite long enough. Now it was *his* turn!

That say of Sandy's lasted pretty well all the way down the hill. Its ingredients comprised taunts, accusations, sneers, new and despotic plans for the future in which *he* would no longer be treated as a fool or a thing of no consequence. Yes, *he* would see to that! Some people never appreciated good husbands when they got them! They never would! Some men, indeed every man in the world but Sandy, it appeared, would not have been patient and enduring and quiet

and self-contained. They would not stand such nonsense from their wives.

"And I'm not going to stand any more of it either," added Sandy furiously. "I—to be walking the roads at this hour—the laughing-stock of one's neighbours—everybody else in bed long ago—the neighbours will think us mad!"

The shawled head turned passionately to him. "Why do you allow your neighbours to rule your life for you and to dictate your rules of conduct? It seems the pivot on which the whole house turns."

Sandy was very angry indeed at that. Glenside was more likely to be considered as dictating to the neighbours. They looked up to him and his family. Anybody would tell her that if she asked.

She was walking quickly, her head lifted to the wind. She held it high and proudly and her red lips had a scornful curve.

For the first time—but was it the first time?—something in her that had always been tender and understanding towards Sandy even when in these moods, deserted her.

She found herself coldly, quietly judging him by new standards as she walked on. Among the ashes of weariness and indifference, the flame stirred again and wavered fitfully. Suddenly it leaped high and clear and, swordlike, pierced her heart. She stopped abruptly and faced him; from out the shawl her eyes blazing at him.

"Let us end it, then," she cried. "Let us end it!"

Sandy stopped as if shot.

"What d'ye mean?"

"What I say," her nostrils dilated. Her voice rang like a challenge: "Once and for all let us end it."

They faced each other in the semi-darkness of the road, those two passionate young creatures. Sandy first recovered himself.

"Ye are daft, woman," he said sternly. And then doggedly, "We are mairrit, and I'll have to put up wi' it. And that's the end o' it."

But she did not move. She thrust the words at him fiercely :

"Is marriage the end? Why should it be? If you want to be free, if you are tired of me, why should we be tied together?"

Sandy's voice abruptly changed. He spoke in the tired voice of one trying laboriously to explain something to one who would not reason things out or see them in their proper proportion.

"I never said I wanted to be free," he asserted. "Ye canna say I have ever given ye such an idea."

She flung round as if to go back up the hill again, as if to ward off the words that were to follow, the explanations of what he did mean—oh, she could not bear it!

"Oh!" she said, and it was as if the word came right out of the depths of her heart, "what is the use of all this, Sandy?" And in that moment, on that dark, lonely road, something happened.

She was only a few yards away from Sandy. She had her face half turned to him, half turned towards the burn road again. She had indeed taken one step towards it.

And suddenly she heard another voice than Sandy's, a voice whispering, urgent, insistent, close to her ear.

"Go back!" it said. "*Go back hame!*"

And as she stood, she heard it again, and recognised the voice :

"Go back, Eltrym."

She stood in the road and cried aloud: "Jeanie! Jeanie!" and fell down in the dust as one stricken.

Sandy turned his head and saw her and ran back to her. He lifted her up and held her against him. For the moment he thought she had fainted.

But she clung to him crying, sobbing: "Let us go home—let us go home."

Sandy took her in his arms but said, with some tenderness and a great deal of exasperation: "Well, that's what I wanted you to do long ago, wasn't it?"

But she said over and over like a child repeating a lesson :

"Let us go home—let us go home."

She leaned against him because she could hardly stand, and let him put his arm around her as they went down the hill together. She felt that in any case he only gave it for support. His tense face and compressed lips showed that he wished her to understand that he did not easily forgive.

She walked on quickly, wordlessly, driven by some mysterious force of propulsion. Once she said to him :

"Did you hear—did you hear?"

"What? The dog? No! You might have known it would have gone home long ago. There's a limit to endurance even in dumb animals!"

She only closed her eyes as if in pain. All about her the world seemed to tremble, the tall trees, the silver stars, even the houses in the quiet street they were entering.

But the voice which had spoken to her in the road, which had stayed her step then and urged her homewards, was by her still, whispering, protective, keeping step with her.

Eltrym said not a word as they turned into the narrow lane at the back of the house. Their steps rang on the cobbles in the silence as they trod its length.

Before they came to the gate they saw the house all lit up. Eltrym began to shake like an aspen leaf.

"Grandfather must have had a turn," said Sandy. "Well, at his age——"

She did not hear him. It was her hand that reached out and thrust open the gate.

In the lighted doorway Christina was standing, grim and terrible. There was something almost triumphant about her. She was not in her pink flannelette nightgown or her woollen slippers, but was fully dressed as if for walking. She was obviously waiting, and in her attitude was a curious air of resignation with a dash of triumph. And suddenly with a low cry, like an animal in pain, Eltrym thrust Sandy's pro-

teaching arm away and rushed up the pathway. But in front of Christina she came abruptly to a halt.

Christina had not moved. Behind her in the kitchen a new-built fire crackled loudly. Sandy's father was bending over it.

Eltrym stood in the path and looked at Christina's set face, at her pale eyes with that uncanny light playing behind them. The very world seemed to stand still.

Christina looked back at her, and in that hour of reckoning, of righteous indignation, she had no mercy :

"The bairn's deid."

CHAPTER XIX

HEART-BREAK

*. . . that dark where, stricken and adaze,
Life's fragile barques are blown and tossed and rent.*

DAVID MORTON.

DAY peeped in, haggard and wan, at the best room window. Its grey, groping fingers touched reluctantly the lifeless-looking aspidistra plants, then hovered about the velvet suite. Even the foolish, hideous woollen flowers were curiously colourless in that hour.

Sandy sat by the ashes of the fire, his head in his hands. He had gone upstairs for the third time and tried the handle of the door. This time he had been more insistent.

"Eltrym, let me in! It is madness to go on like this."

A fire of wrath began to burn in his heart, ousting the sense of sorrow and loss that had come upon him.

It was ridiculous to be placed in such a position, to be shut out of his own room. It was madness for her to be sitting there alone with the dead child. Why, she had not even answered anyone's knock, not even that of the doctor who, a friend of the family, had stayed to sympathise.

She had said to the doctor, the door shut between them :

"Go away! Go away, all of you! Leave me alone!"

It was an extraordinary position for any sensible man to be placed in.

He flung himself again into the chair that stood by the fireplace, waiting sullenly. He was sorry for the

death of the child; of course he was. If it came to that, he told himself, he probably felt it more than anyone else.

Women made fusses as a rule, and screamed, and fainted, but a man could find no such relief even if he desired to. He had just to sit and fume and fret in silence. Once or twice his hand stole to his pocket for his pipe, then he remembered that Christina had had the curtains laundered and that it would not do.

And it was typical of Sandy's attitude that he was not studying Christina so much as the curtains.

But he wandered restlessly out into the dark garden more than once, and down the lane and smoked there.

He was remembering another such night when he had paced up and down the lane, and had been shut out from that upstairs room. He recalled how, for a brief while, he had been admitted after a whispered conference with the nurse and had seen his wife, terror in her eyes that were so strangely dark and dilated, her hands clenched on the counterpane. "Don't go far away," she had whispered to him then. And the slow hours had crept on then as now; and he had trodden the lane and watched the night die slowly, until near dawn had come to him, even out there, one long cry that seemed to fill the world with its clamour.

And now it was all in vain, apparently, the anguish he and she had endured that night, for the child was dead. He was not sure that he wanted another, just then, at any rate. The child had, in a sense, separated them, especially lately. How else account for her alternate moods of restlessness and fretfulness and passionate remorse?

He had told her more than once that she set more store by the child than by him. *He* had to be merely the provider, the hewer of wood and the drawer of water.

As he puffed at his pipe he felt sorry for himself, and wondered how many other men were in like position. He had an idea that no other man but himself felt it so acutely, anyway. He really must have a

straight talk to Eltrym after this sorry business was over.

"Take her attitude to Christina! Where in all Paisley could you find a better-thought-of woman than Kirstie Mackinnon?"

Nothing frivolous was there about *her*! There never had been and never would be. Christina would never have been influenced by catch-penny advertisements in drapers' windows or been inveigled by a silly, feather-headed neighbour into buying what she did not want.

It would really be better if Eltrym would go shopping with Christina, as he had more than once advised, for Kirstie's opinion was deliberate and always worth having.

He did want his wife to be liked by Christina and his father. He had desired it passionately when he first brought her to Glenside. And yet somehow his plans had miscarried. It was inexplicable. Dash it all, he couldn't understand it! As far as he could see, Christina was the same as she had always been, kind in her quiet way, always punctiliously just and straightforward. Eltrym never seemed to appreciate the qualities she found in that household. She said nothing much, of course, but she *looked* it. That was that damned McCrimmon manner again, and then remembrance surged back on Sandy. He got up and walked to the window and a sharp stab of pain came to him.

Day was breaking. He would never until the last hour of his life forget the night which had passed. He felt he had endured it stoically and as few men would have done. Men with less strength of character would have made a scene, perhaps.

There had been that first terrible hour of all when his wife had flung Christina aside and rushed upstairs past his father, who would have stayed her, past the doctor with his peering, short-sighted eyes and his habit of putting his hands and the tips of his fingers thoughtfully together as if for prayer.

Really, Eltrym had insulted them all by such conduct.

Christina had been thrust aside with such force that she had nearly fallen. She had shaken all over, whether in fear or wrath Sandy did not know. His father had said, "Ay, it's a shockin' thing—I had my own opeenion, but I said naethin'!" What he was referring to no one seemed to know. No one could tell how it happened. The baby had died in its sleep; the maid had somehow been aware of their absence and had gone in to see if everything was right.

The old doctor had pursed his lips, put his hands devotionally together and said, "Heart! It had to come, sooner or later."

The senior Mackinnon launched out then on a discussion which, long-winded enough, proved conclusively that there had been no such thing as heart in *his* family. The doctor nodded. He warmed his coat-tails by the fire, looked at his watch and then benignly at Christina, who was hospitably and in silence making tea and toast.

Sandy had gone upstairs after his wife. They heard him climbing them slowly, obviously broken up.

"Ah, very sad!" said the doctor. "Very sad to lose one's first-born." He was an old bachelor, but he spoke with just the right amount of sympathy. "But these things happen; however, they are both young and, of course, there will be more children. Still, it's a strange thing a woman never forgets her first-born."

He was feeling sorry indeed for Mrs. Mackinnon. He had somehow always felt sorry for her from the first day he met her, because she did not seem to fit in any way into her surroundings. She was so utterly different from the sort of wife he would have chosen for Sandy Mackinnon.

It had given him the same sensation as seeing an exquisite piece of Dresden ware, of value unknown, stowed away on a shelf with clay pots, the latter eminently wearable and useful articles, and, as such, of value, but intrinsically worthless.

Sandy's father was still talking about hearts, and the doctor nodded thoughtfully as he stirred his tea. But he was wondering all the time how this very sad and tragically sudden affair was going to affect Mrs. Mackinnon. He shook his head and rose.

Sandy was coming downstairs again. He wore a frown as he entered the room, but he said nothing until he had escorted the doctor to the door. In the silence of the hall he spoke :

"She's locked the door."

The doctor nodded. "Ay, well, ye'd better leave her to herself for a wee while, Sandy. She will be a' the better for it. She will probably cry herself to sleep. I wouldn't go up just yet." He held out his hand. "I'm sorry for ye, Sandy. He was a fine wee chap and very like you."

Sandy nodded briefly. "It's a blow."

His eyes were dazed as he shut the hall door behind the doctor. He did not go back into the kitchen where his father and Christina sat. He went into the best room and shut the door behind him for a while. He had loved and been proud of his son.

He sat looking into the fire, thinking. And by and by thought became confused, for he was very tired :

"Poor little chap! Who would have thought he would go off like that, so suddenly?" But he remembered the doctor's saying, after the child was a few months old, that the heart was weak—a little weak, he had said—but nothing to worry over.

What was Eltrym doing upstairs? Why had she shut the door? She should have let *him* in. Was he not the father of the little chap? Had not he, too, loved him and worked for him, and planned to save for him? It would be like Eltrym to forget that. She might have considered him in this hour. After all, it was her fault that they were not at home when it happened.

Then he caught himself up. Well, Eltrym and he would be all the more to each other because of this tragedy. It would bring them closer together. And

there must be no more of these night walks at absurd hours. Really, it was time Eltrym settled down.

"Things couldn't go on much longer as they were going," said Sandy to himself.

His father poked his head in at the door. The candle he carried lit up his solemn white face. "Good night, son. I suppose there'll be no need for me to be stoppin' up longer?"

"None, father. Good night!"

The old man went upstairs and paused outside the bedroom door. "Good night, dochter!"

No voice answered apparently, for he moved off and entered his own room.

Christina opened the drawing-room door and looked at her brother.

"Will ye hae a cup o' tea, Sandy?"

He shook his head. "No, thanks, Christina. Don't wait up. Ye can do no good."

She hesitated. "There's a cup left if Eltrym would care for it."

He turned his head and saw that she was looking at him in a queer, half shamefaced way. Her eyes were red as if she had been crying.

"I'm awfu' sorry about the wee bairn," said Christina. "I'm awfu' sorry for—ye baith." Then she abruptly shut the door.

After that he went up again and gently tried the door handle. It still remained fast.

Sandy sighed. He called "Eltrym." Still she did not answer, and this time he crept downstairs, conscious of the stirring of some resentment in his grief for her and for the child.

Down in the room below it was very silent. In the garden outside a tree-branch tapped at fitful intervals against the pane. Once he thought he heard a low, pitiful moaning—and again, queerly enough, a sound of happy crooning. Perhaps it was in the house next door, some mother singing ever so softly her baby to sleep, unconscious that Death had passed by. He listened, and once or twice it came again. It had an

erie sound in the silence. Once it had seemed, impossible thing, to be in this very house.

Poor Eltrym! How long would it be before she opened the door and came down to him and cried on his shoulder? Or perhaps she would call him upstairs? Anyhow he would be very tender to her. She had loved the little thing so passionately.

But no call came. The house seemed to sleep and Sandy found himself dropping off to sleep with it.

With a start he found that the fire had died down and the room was cold. He had seen by their faces what his father and Christina were thinking. Both had gone to their rooms with an air of finality, as if they would be regarded as of no further use, let alone consideration. How could Eltrym behave like that? What could she be doing? Surely, not praying, hour after hour, by the cot where the child lay?

There came no sound from upstairs. The house was very still about him. Across the road the neighbour's house stood unwakened and aloof, unconscious as yet of the tragedy at Glenside.

Because of far-seeing Christina, no neighbour had been sent for in that hour when even a stranger's voice and sympathy are at least comforting. Christina, you see, had looked beyond the spoken sympathy to the thought, spoken or unspoken:

"And where were the puir wee bairn's father and mother when it happened?"

Sandy moved in his chair by the fire. Dawn was at hand, and soon the world about them would know. The news would spread as in its miraculous way news does. Already in the scullery the girl was beginning to clatter the pots and pans. Soon the milkman, cheerfully banging his cans, would be at the door. Then whispering and the subdued departure of the milkman, the shake of the head and the query at the next door: "Hae ye heard the news?" and another shake of his head in the direction of Glenside. Then kindly, excited, but subdued voices, the hall crowded with hurriedly shawled, whispering womenfolk——

And upstairs Eltrym, still in the room with the dead child—— The whole position was incredible, monstrous, food for amazed gossip and discussion. It really could not in decency's name be tolerated any longer. It was not respectable.

The clock in the hall tick-tocked its indignation that such a thing should be expected to be tolerated. *Whose* house, it asked in injured accents, was it? Throatily and loudly it proclaimed the hour.

Sandy lifted his head and listened. No sound came from the room overhead, but he thought he had heard a curious whimpering as if somewhere in the house the dog was loose. He went out into the kitchen to see, and there among her pots and her pans was the maid, greeting, rocking herself backwards and forwards, her dirty apron thrown over her head.

He stared at her but said no word. He encountered Christina in the drawing-room. She carried a candle in her hand, and her face was very grey and grim and set. She looked at him coldly :

"I thoct I heard ye upstairs. Have ye no gone up yet? I was verra sure I heard Eltrym talkin' to ye."

Behind her on the walls his kinsfolk looked down sternly, as if in denunciation of his weakness.

He felt suddenly resentful against them, against Christina. After all, it was his business and not theirs if she chose to stay upstairs.

The grey light that clung to the room had grown brighter, more merciless. It showed up with aggravating distinctness the glaring mango-coloured plush, the carpet, the crudities of the whole apartment, the un-lived-in air about it.

He found himself talking to the room rather than Christina with a new hostility and impatience :

"She has locked the door."

Christina looked at him as if she could not believe her ears. That anyone, and that one practically an outsider, should take it upon herself to lock a door as if the house belonged to her ! For a moment, in her

indignation at such presumption, Christina lost sight of the tragedy.

"Weel——" she said with a long breath. Then she went out to the kitchen and brought him back a key. "It fits," she said, and turned away.

Sandy went up the stairs, his lips unusually firm. But when, key in hand, he came to the door, he instinctively paused. What was happening in that room? Why had Eltrym shut herself in and ignored his appeals and demands to open the door? And while he waited he heard her voice but not the words. She was pleading, beseeching, saying something over and over again. The sound of her crying behind the closed door came to him as he thrust the key in the lock.

The door swung open. As long as he lived, Sandy felt he would remember that scene. His wife was sitting on the hearth-rug, by the fire, holding her dead child in her arms. She did not even hear the door open. She saw nothing but the bairn in her arms. She was speaking to it in a hoarse, whispering voice. One could not repeat the things she said, the terrible pleading of them.

Sandy stopped, overwhelmed by the appeal of this sudden, pitiful thing. She had wrapped a blanket and shawl about the child. She was rocking it to and fro in a vain endeavour to bring back life.

"Oh, my bairn! Come back! Come back!"

"*Eltrym!*" said Sandy. "This is utter madness."

She turned to him, her face white, her eyes wide. They were feverishly bright. They stared at him.

"Oh, Sandy,—he's so cauld—and the fire has gone out and I canna warm him——"

The child's head lay against her breast, the fair head shining and yellow against her gown. She laid her cheek upon it.

"He's so cauld," she whispered, "so cauld—if some-one only would light a fire——"

Sandy strode across the room to her. He went to take the child from her, and suddenly she flared forth

on him. Her eyes blazed and she raised one hand as if to strike—like a tigress defending her cub.

For a second they stood thus, and it seemed as if a river of hate flowed between them, a river in flood swirling past, carrying everything before it.

Then Sandy caught her arm and held it tightly. His heart knocked loudly. His face was white as that of the dead child. He feared at first his wife had lost her reason.

"The child's deid," he said. "The bairn's deid. It's madness to go on like this."

Loud and insistent his voice beat its way to her ears at last. She stared at him, and then suddenly if he had not caught her she would have fallen. The sound of her moaning was unbearable, terrible in its intensity of anguish and realisation.

She sat in the chair in which he had placed her. Her head lolled against the arm, her hair all disordered fell tragically about her face. She moaned and went on moaning in a dull, hopeless way.

Sandy had taken the child from her and had put it back in the cot and drawn the sheet reverently over it. It seemed a dreadful thing that all these hours, when he had believed his wife to be on her knees by the cot, she had been hovering over the dying fire, refusing to believe, trying to warm the cold little limbs to life again, crying to the child to return.

The moaning went on as if it would never end. He felt as if he must put his hands to his ears and go out of the house.

He brought her a glass of water and held it out to her. "Drink this, Eltrym."

But the moaning went on as if she did not hear him. She was wandering on a road alone, in a world of anguish, and voices about her were but as the distant cries of birds in flight, trailing across the windy, desolate sky.

"Drink this, Eltrym," said Sandy more authoritatively. His heart pounded but his voice was calm. He held the tilted glass near her lips, and some of the water

splashed on her dress and on her bright hair that almost veiled her face.

"Look here, Eltrym," Sandy said with unconcealed impatience. "It's madness to be going on like this. It won't do you any good and it won't do the child any good. You *must* pull yourself together and not go on like this. It's not"—he looked round for a suitable word—"it's not Christian."

The moaning stopped suddenly but not because of Sandy's exhortation, for as he bent to press the glass to her lips and bid her drink, her body relaxed suddenly. The clenched hands fell open, palm outwards, in a curious way. Her head fell forward heavily and inertly, and she slipped on to the floor, where she lay unconscious now of misery and distress. She looked so young and helpless, so absolutely beaten. She was so strangely quiet.

Sandy ran to the door and called. Mysie, frightened and furtive, who had been hovering near at hand, came in and together they lifted the unconscious figure on to the bed.

An hour afterwards her eyes opened. They looked at Sandy, at the kind doctor who nodded his head to her cheerily. His voice came from afar off. He was doing something with a shiny needle and a cup of hot water.

"Been running down just like a clock," he said, "just like a clock."

He was holding her wrist, and now she felt dimly a prick like that of a pin.

She heard the doctor's voice again, it seemed a long time afterwards:

"You'll stay, of course, Sandy."

She seemed even in that remote dim region in which she had begun to wander faintly to sense the struggle in Sandy's methodical mind. There was his duty; he never stayed away from school under any pretext. But here, on the other hand, was his wife, sick and in need.

It was so strange, she seemed to be travelling through the halls of Sandy's mind, as it were, watching thoughts

arise, like deliberate ghosts, and gather together for decision.

She heard them speak. "There's the schule—but if ye think best, doctor—Christina is a guid nurse and I'm no sure if I'd be of ony use——"

What anyone thought did not matter. She was wandering now on the hills by Loch Fyne, and the breath of the morning wind, leaf-scented and cool, was in her face. She had come a long, long way and she was exhausted. She sat down on the hill and the rainy wind touched her face. It had been all a dream that she had been unhappy—someone had told her a lie about a baby being dead, for here it was against her heart, warm and alive—and now it was running across the fields, laughing and prattling, calling to her to follow—now it ran back to her, lifted its face——

She put out one hand and touched the pillow beside her in a gesture infinitely pathetic. It was cool and soft to those poor fumbling fingers, soft and cool like the cheek of a child. She had drawn a long, sighing breath.

"My bairn ! " she had whispered. "My wee bairn ! "

The doctor put down the thin wrist he had held and straightened himself.

"She will be all right. She will sleep for hours."

And while she was wrapped in that heavy drugged slumber they took away the child.

CHAPTER XX

STRAWS IN THE WIND

*. . . Somewhere in the world outside
A thrush was singing in the sun,
Of wide blue skies and fields of gold.
(The bells were ringing for a bride.)
And I knelt in the shadows cold—
I closed my ears, as one by one,
Over and over, my beads I told.*

ETHEL, STONEHOUSE.

ELTRYM was overhauling the basket of socks by the kitchen fire.

She was darning them very neatly and seriously, as if all her heart and soul were bound up in the undertaking.

Slowly and almost methodically, as if the hand that held the needle were Christina's, the black darning-wool weaved its way in and out, and crossed and re-crossed in a miracle of neatness.

Then she laid it down by its fellow, among a neatly darned pile, and took up another, inserted the wooden heel, rethreaded the needle, and bent over her work again.

Sandy glanced across at her once or twice with pardonable pride. Really, that talk of a few weeks ago had almost miraculous results.

Apart from the darning, there had been improvements in every direction. The bedroom was no longer littered untidily with things that should have been folded neatly away in the bureau, or with hats that should have been resting in tissue paper in neat boxes. Nor were there foolish, bright ribbons scattered among Sandy's neat pile of collars and handkerchiefs.

A place for everything and everything in its place!

It had taken a long time indeed for that motto to sink into his wife's pretty and once carelessly dressed head, but now nothing could be neater than the way her hair was brushed back from her face. The old, unruly curls were hairpinned back. Sometimes in the breeze they were apt to rebel and blow about her face, but, as young Mrs. Mackinnon never went out, this did not often happen.

She was paler and quieter, and, though she was thinner, to be sure, she had gained in deportment. Even the Elder had admitted more than once to his son that there was a wonderful change in his daughter-in-law.

"There are such things as blessings in disguise," he said. "Sorrow is sent to try us. She's no a bad lassie at a'. There's the makin' o' a sensible woman in her."

This was praise indeed, and Sandy glowed righteously under it, as one responsible for the improvement. He remembered at times that she had not laughed spontaneously since the child died. She seldom spoke unless spoken to. Well, that was a good thing in a woman. He had much to be thankful for.

Even the old grandfather, in his corner by the fireplace, no longer chatted and laughed at her as if she were some pretty toy for his amusement. The old man had grown quieter, too. He was apt to have long spells when he sat, peering silently and monkey-like at them, one after the other, out of bright eyes that seemed perpetually considering some problem. Then he would sigh as if it had eluded him, and shut his eyes and sleep as if that were the end of it. But when he woke up he always stared fixedly for a while at Sandy's wife as if he would be quite sure that she was really there. It appeared to puzzle him at times.

Once he had croaked, pointing a skinny, yellow claw in her direction, "Who's that?—who's that?—who's that?"

No one answered because the old man was, without doubt, always wandering in his mind. He had come to the stage when it just meant feeding him and attending to him as if he were a helpless baby.

Eltrym went on darning her socks, her head bent. The light showed shining threads in the tightly strained back coils of hair at the nape of her neck, where rebel curls that would neither grow nor straighten were pinned under and out of sight.

Her hands went about their work steadily. Sandy's father was reading the paper as was his wont. He snorted as he turned the page.

"There's nae mair poetry nowadays frae the chap that was tae be a second Bobby Burns," he complained.

No one said anything, though Eltrym was conscious that Sandy lifted his head and glanced in her direction. The shining needle never wavered. It went its slow way as if things such as aspiring poets were of no consequence.

Her father-in-law spoke to her freely. "Ye've made a grand job o' those socks o' mine, Eltrym."

"I'm pleased to hear it."

She talked and walked and worked as an automaton in these days; she no longer flashed into explanations of how she hated darning and mending, and thus she ceased to shock and hurt his feelings. She was very gentle with him.

He patted her head as he passed her a moment later. "Ay, we'll mak' a fine woman o' ye yet." And he laughed as if it were a great joke or as something no longer past praying for.

"Ay!"

Sometimes, her new brevity, her tacit agreement with whatever was said or done, annoyed Sandy. This was all the more inexplicable because had he not always desired this very thing to come to pass? Had he not always lectured and advised to this end?

Christina had risen and was folding away her work. Soon she would light and set the candles in place, and Sandy would put away his books and papers, and attend to the gas and observe the nightly ritual.

Eltrym said to herself: "It will be the same, night after night, even when I am an old, old woman."

But her hands did not tremble as she folded up her

work. Her heart did not hurt or rebel. There came no wild desire as of old for freedom, no beating of frail wings against the bars. She looked dully down the long vista of the years to be, and part of the old age she might be called upon to endure was on her even then.

Apathy wrapped her around as Mr. Mackinnon senior opened the Bible, and they all sat in their places as he began to read. Soon he would rise up and, taking his candle, say, as he said night after night, year after year :

"Weel, I'm aff to bed! Good night, Christina—good night, dochter—good night, son!"

And they would dutifully echo his "good night" and follow. The doors of the rooms would slam and the house settle down to the hours of sleep.

And Eltrym said, "It will go on like this, year after year, even when I am an old, old woman."

They went up to their room, she and Sandy—Sandy lighting the way with the candle and the brass glinting as he moved. She no longer leaned out of the window and called him to look at the stars over Craigie Burn, or the string of lamp-jewels, shining like topaz across the darkness.

Methodically, before she settled to the sewing and the darning and the mending that each night brought, she drew the blinds and shut out all these things.

What had they to do with her? Where could they lead? It was her duty—she was trying so bravely nowadays to do her duty—to take her part in the house, to study Sandy, poor kind Sandy, who was now methodically putting aside his collar and handkerchief for the next morning, and who had been at such pains to tell her how she had hitherto neglected him, had never considered him or his feelings. She tried very hard to do her best nowadays, when life was as a dull half-darkened road of days to be, such as the day that passed. In the apathy of weariness and indifference that clung to her she could not even think, she did not want to think.

But that night, and many nights long after Sandy slept, she lay awake. Sometimes she saw the grey dawn behind the blinds before she slept. She was not able to reason clearly and concisely, she only appeared to be waiting, half dumb, half blind and utterly impotent for something to happen.

And, as in the crises in her life, Jeanie came to her once between the dark and dawn. She never knew whether she was awake or asleep, but she heard Jeanie's voice, and it was troubled.

"The field of stars," it said, "the field of stars—and a star shall rise and set—and the light fade with its setting—but one will never quite forget—sleeping or waking one can never quite forget——"

She had sat upright in bed, her heart beating fast. She stared into the dim, faintly greying depths of the room. But there was only the curtain moving on the air from the slightly open windows.

Sandy stirred in his sleep and muttered something, and she lay down beside him and pressed her face against his broad warm back because she was suddenly cold.

All throughout the day she waited. Was it but a dream? What was she waiting for? The post in the early afternoon answered. She had gone along to the door and picked up the letters. There were two for her, and she stood stock-still as she stared at the London postmark and then at the name on the back of one.

She had prayed in these desolate days for a sign, for something to show her what she should do; for help to plod on and on until she was old, and satisfied and content to sit back and not think at all.

Christina came into the hall, wondering why she stayed there so long, and she roused herself and handed over the rest of the letters.

There was one from home, she mentioned and hesitated. She did not speak of the other. She could not read it there with Christina's shrewd eyes on her face.

The letter from home was brief. It was filled with her mother's complaints. Eltrym's father, it appeared,

had taken it upon himself to get ill just at the time when no one expected it of him. He had always done the unexpected.

"He wants to see you," the letter ended. "Personally I cannot see there is much wrong with him, but he has got an idea that he is going to be an invalid for the rest of his days. But I would be pleased to see you myself for a few days."

She told Christina, who made no comment and had her own opinions as to what was wrong with the graceless Hardie. "It was not temperance that ailed him," she would have said had she voiced her thoughts aloud.

Up in her room later Eltrym with trembling fingers took the other letter out of the pocket where she had thrust it. For a moment she could not open it.

Maybe, it was to say, after all this long silence, that they were sending back the manuscript of those poor verses she had sent. She had written them at white heat, but now she had no longer faith in them. She tore open the envelope quickly and read the typewritten lines. They were courteous and to the point.

Poetry, they said, had been a drug in the market but there were signs of a renaissance. They were prepared to publish, on the usual royalty basis and without advance, a majority of the poems under a title taken from a line in one of the smaller poems, "The Field of Stars."

"The Field of Stars!" said Eltrym, and the letter shook in her hands.

And there came again the troubled voice of Jeanie.

"And a star shall rise and set—and the light fade with its setting—but one will never quite forget—sleeping or waking one can never quite forget——"

Findlay and Anderson were going to publish the verses—they had called them poems with a capital P. They were even going to pay on a royalty basis for them, and Sandy, in that never-to-be-forgotten discussion on literature, had said that no one paid for poetry nowadays! Everybody wrote poetry of sorts!

She trembled all over and suddenly she went down

on her knees by the bed and laid her face on her hands and cried.

The hot stinging tears were the first she had shed since her wee Peter had died. It was as if her dead heart turned slowly in its grave, woke in travail to life. Slowly, so slowly that heavy weight of apathy began to lift.

The tears fell more quietly and in healing. They were washing away that dull aching which seemed to have no end, the soreness, and all the hurt. But they brought her also and inevitably the sharp anguish of remembrance.

She was sitting by the window looking out over the street and the roof-tops when Sandy came in. It was the first time for many weeks that she had been idle like that. Her hands were clasped loosely in her lap in the old dreaming way which to Sandy had always spelt utter sloth of mind and body.

He did not know that she sat at the loom of dreams and was weaving strange wonderful songs that were afterwards to be set to music and sung in crowded concert-halls. She had no idea of that either.

He only knew that she had not greeted him at his entrance, that Christina had shrugged her shoulders and said she did not know, when he had asked her where Eltrym was, and that it had been a tiring, irritable day, when a man might well expect some consideration from his wife when he came home.

And what sort of reception was this, he would like to know? A sister sulking in the kitchen and a wife sulking in the bedroom with never even a word to throw at him.

He went round the room opening drawers and shutting them, apparently hunting for something.

"A nice sort of reception this, I must say," he observed at last.

Eltrym gave a start. The glowing, rose-patterned threads on the loom snapped suddenly. The sound of invisible golden-stringed harps abruptly ceased. Sandy's voice, not at all like a harp, went on :

"What's the matter? I had hoped quarrels between you and Christina were a thing of the past."

She looked at him in surprise. "We have not quarrelled. Indeed, Sandy"—earnestly—"Christina and I never really quarrelled at any time."

"Oh, no!" Sandy was in one of his sarcastic moods. "By no means, not at all. Different people have different names for it, I know. But it doesn't alter facts."

Sandy was always talking about facts. "*Facts!* That's what counts in life. *Facts!* Let us get down to facts."

She hated the very word just as she hated plush furniture and green rep curtains and crayon family portraits.

All the things that had buoyed her up, as on wings, since she had read that letter, all the beautiful, wonderful thoughts, that sense of exhilaration, the sudden rising, as it were, of a sun across a grey world—all these things deserted her.

It was as if props that had supported her had inexplicably given way, had let her down, and she was groping feebly among the ruins.

Weariness of spirit swooped like a cloud over her. The sun went out of the day, taking the golden glory with it. She was one with the misty dusk, damp and chilled.

"That's right," said Sandy. "Sulk away! I'll get used to it in time, I dare say."

"I am not sulking, Sandy"—she spoke gently. "I was only—thinking when you came in——" And then: "Don't let us quarrel—now—Sandy."

Her voice shook; it was husky as if tears were not far away, and as she turned her face to him he saw the stain of tears on her cheek.

Sandy felt suddenly remorseful. There was on her face the pathetic lonely expression of one unaware of offence and anxious to be friendly.

Sandy wavered. He stood in front of her, planting his legs apart.

"D'ye really mean you and Christina haven't had a tiff?"

"Really, Sandy." Then she hesitated. "Perhaps she is in one of her moods."

But Sandy never conceded that anyone, save his wife, was guilty of moods. He waved the suggestion aside and then sat down in the window-seat beside her.

She looked charming for all the evidence of tears and the way her hair had tumbled about her face. He put his arm about her waist and held her to his heart.

"Any news?"

She perceptibly paused. "A letter from home. My father is ill."

Sandy's keen eyes saw she was keeping something back. He grunted at it, thinking it was the nature of the illness. "He's been at it again, has he?"

She shook her head. "I don't think it's that."

Sandy grumbled again and rose. "Well—we shall see. Where is the letter?"

He skimmed it through. "H'm! He wants you to go and see him, does he? You can't give in to him like that, even if it were convenient."

"Why would it be inconvenient, Sandy?"

He looked at her in surprise. "Do you mean to say you want to go?"

She had risen, too, and was looking out of the window again. "I think I do."

"That's a different story, my dear, from when I first saw you, isn't it? You never wanted to go back again, I understood."

She was silent for a while. "I would like to see my father, Sandy. He may be really ill."

"And he may not! Your mother doesn't believe it, you can see that."

"Mother doesn't always understand him."

"Imphm! You'll be saying that I don't understand you yet."

"I wonder, Sandy—do you?"

"I just do. Make no mistake about that, Eltrym. I know you better than you know yourself. I'm a pretty

good judge of character, though I say so myself. You will have to alter in many ways if you are to get anything out of life."

She laughed; it had a sound like tears. "I'm afraid it's too late now, Sandy, for alterations."

But Sandy was more healthily concerned about his tea. "Come on, Eltrym! I wonder if you will ever learn to be punctual."

They went down together, Sandy talking about the events of the day. These were very much alike but they were always of interest to the tea-table.

So-and-So's son had left the school and was to attend the University, or Such-and-Such's son had just begun. Smith's daughter was taking up teaching as a profession. Mackinnon senior harked back to the days when he had known the fathers of the various parties, what *they* were like, and sometimes what their fathers before them were like.

"I mind that yin weel. His mither had a sweetie-shop in the Candleriggs—and yon Ferguson—I ken him, too. Let me see, it must be near on twenty-five years ago since he mairrit," and so forth.

Christina would join in at times. Somebody's friend or relation had been to call, or had written; or she had gone out to visit someone; or the price of sugar had gone up and the price of potatoes down; or the greengrocer had never kenned such a bad year for ingans all his life; or the baker's bread was no good the day. She had heard a rumour that there were bottles in his yard that had held more than yeast.

So the meal progressed. And now Sandy launched forth on the topic of Eltrym's father's illness. He made a jest of it.

"Wants Eltrym to hold his hand and pray for him."

Christina shook her grey head. "There's mair folk than him that wants prayin' for."

This touch was not lost on Eltrym. Perhaps she was hypersensitive in believing that while Christina seemingly addressed the jam-dish in front of her she was in reality directing her observation at someone else.

The old man by the corner of the chimney chuckled loudly. His eyes peered before him, away from them all with the uncanny air of one gazing at something which they could not see. He laughed again, and then dropped into a litany of commiseration for himself:

"Poor auld man! Poor auld man! Poor auld man!"

That night Eltrym lingered about their room upstairs as if loath for bed and sleep. At last she drew up the blind a little way and looked out.

The stars shone out of a very clear frosty sky, darkly sapphire and like velvet in softness. They twinkled and scintillated, and she watched them dreamily.

For the moment she forgot Sandy, who was waiting to undress and put on his pyjamas.

She was thinking instead of the letter. Now perhaps would be the hour to tell Sandy the wonderful news.

Her spirits soared on wings of fancy. Her heart sang. Her lips moved and almost unconsciously she began to speak:

"Oh, Love and I went wandering
Across the field of stars;
Far, far below we saw Earth peer
From out her cloudy bars."

One of Sandy's boots, dropped impatiently, broke the spell.

Sandy was handling his pyjamas. "If ye would draw the blind," he suggested. "I've no mind to be makin' an exhibition of myself before the neighbours."

The blind fell into place with a click and shut out the night and the stars.

"What was that you were saying a moment ago?" said Sandy.

She repeated the four lines to him, her face turned away.

"Ye gods!" said Sandy. "What piffle!" And then he turned and caught her eye. "Bless my soul!" he chuckled, "if I don't believe it's by that Roberta Burns again."

CHAPTER XXI

THE ROAD OF REBELLION

*In a house behind me, in the crowded city,
I heard a man and woman quarrelling.
I only know I never dreamed such words
Could fall from human lips. . . . I turned away,
And marvelled at this life, but most of all
At love and the strange riddle of the world.*

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE.

"BUT it really is rubbish," maintained Sandy, "so what's the use of talking about it?"

Now he pointed a triumphant and accusing finger at her. "Who ever heard of such a thing as a field of stars? Answer me that!"

She had turned aside. He could just see her exquisite almost flawless profile and the pale gold of her loosened hair about her face. She was making long sweeping movements with the brush and her hair rippled and gleamed.

"Ay, answer me that, Eltrym, will you? There you are, you see——"

She did not answer. She had grown suddenly quiet and deliberate after she had flared up at him like an angry child, because he had called her "Roberta Burns."

"You can't put stuff like that on the market. Really, dearie, I'm advising you for your own good——"

The shining lengths of hair seemed to leap into life and to bristle under the swift onslaught of the brush. She swung round on him passionately:

"I don't want advice. I hate advice. I'm sick of the very word. Can't you see I'm sick of it? What have I ever had since I came into this house but advice

hurled at my head day and night? I warn you, Sandy, that I'm just at the breaking point of endurance. I've been patient——"

"Patient!" ejaculated Sandy. He laughed in a way that made her clench her hands over the slim brush handle. "*You* patient——"

He laughed again, as if it amused him beyond words. If he had let it go at that, the moment might have passed safely as it had passed often enough before. But the tragedy for Sandy had always been that he could not leave well alone but demonstrate to the last his right to speak as well as other people.

"It strikes me," he said, "that if there's any man in this town with a store of patience it is Alexander Mac-kinnon junior."

Her eyes, dark pools now, might have warned him. They looked back at her from the glass as the eyes of some other woman, hard and cold.

"One can't express an opinion," said Sandy, "but you're down on him at once. I simply said, to use a colloquialism, that a field of stars was utter rubbish. And so it is. It is absolute piffle."

She remarked quietly: "That is only your opinion."

Sandy bristled. He sat up in bed like Mrs. Caudle on the point of uttering a scorcher.

"And it's the opinion of every other sensible man and woman," he retorted. "You ask anyone with a grain of common sense."

"I have no need to ask." She had resumed the brushing of the long strands of her hair, but her hands trembled. On her cheeks two red spots glowed brightly.

"You are very sure."

"I am quite sure."

"May I ask why?"

"Certainly." Her voice had changed. It was quieter and fuller than he had ever heard it. She turned to him from the glass. The glory of her hair made a shining veil about her tense figure as she faced him.

"If a publisher will bring out a book by that name,

I suppose you will allow the world holds other opinions besides your own."

He shrugged in the way that always exasperated her. "If he will. I don't know any publisher who is likely to."

"But it is true, nevertheless." Her eyes looked at him clear and challenging. "A book of verse called 'The Field of Stars' is to be published next March."

"Imphm!" He was plainly sceptical. "By whom, may I ask?"

She turned to the mirror and laid down the brush.

"They were written by me."

There was a moment's silence as she began to plait her hair. Then Sandy said deliberately, cruelly:

"I think I'd like proof of that. I've heard stories like that before, ye ken."

Her mood changed to anger, but she kept it well under control, though indeed, as she had said, her endurance was almost at breaking point.

He had studiously insulted her, had said in effect that she was lying. That something in her, proud and cold, stood taut, waiting, judging Sandy as never before.

At first she thought of taking the letter from her dress where she had hidden it, and flinging it to him, saying:

"Look for yourself!"

But that new something which had taken her place, which she, Eltrym, seemed surely to be listening to and watching, said quietly and very clearly:

"You will very shortly have the proof you require. It is not very long to wait, after all."

There she was, that McCrimmon manner again! Sandy had always resented it but now he hated it, and steeled himself against the conflict which he was instinctively if vaguely aware was taking place within her mind.

For his defence he chose the arms which came most readily to him, those of sneer and sarcasm.

"All very well. All very well, indeed, my dear. But

I'd like the proof now, *if* you don't mind. I suppose you have proof?"

The grave eyes met his. There was something gently contemptuous in them that lashed him to fury. She spoke quietly.

"I have decided not to discuss the question further with you, Sandy."

He was up in arms in a moment. "Ay," triumphantly and truculently, "you mean ye canna?"

She remained very calm.

"I mean I will not."

"That's one way of getting out of it. But let us come down to facts——"

"I tell you I will not discuss the matter further with you, Sandy; at this juncture, at any rate." She spoke with deliberation. "There, as far as I am concerned, the matter ends."

"As far as you are concerned. But I'm in no such mind to shelve things. I'd have ye know that I don't beat about the bush. You've started the argument and you've had your say; now I'll have mine."

"Sandy, I am tired."

"Ay! You should have thought of that hours ago, instead of keeping everyone in the house awake by your haverings. You've had your say, and now," obstinately, "I'll have mine."

"Sandy, I tell you I will not listen. No, don't interrupt me until I finish." She was standing by the foot of the bed, facing him. "We can't go on quarrelling like this——"

"Who began it, I'd like to know——"

She went on as if he had not interrupted, and still in that quiet, deliberate voice. "To quarrel like this is degrading. It shows that our marriage has, after all, been built on the flimsiest foundations, that neither of us is suited to the other. Let us end it: let me go away."

Sandy's laugh cut her like the lash of a whip. "Ye would go hame, I suppose. I'm no sure that you'd get much welcome there. They weren't so sorry to lose ye, it strikes me."

She was white to the lips : "No, I won't go home ; I have other plans."

"You have, have ye? And mebbe I hae my plans as well."

"Will you listen, Sandy, or will you not?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, go on with your hawering, if it pleases you. I'm going to sleep and I'd advise ye, if ye have any common sense left, to do the same, my dear."

But she stood firm. There came something of pleading into her voice.

"Listen, Sandy," for he was drawing the blankets about him and making pretence of preparations for sleep. "Will you let me go away for a while, until our home is ready, perhaps, or until both of us have thought over things clearly and come to some decision?"

"I've come to this decision," said Sandy's muffled voice from under the bedclothes, "that few folk will be able to sleep in this house if you're going to stand there talking at this hour."

"I'm going to talk," she said quietly, "until you listen. It's no use your pretending to snore, Sandy. Let us have no subterfuges."

"Subterfuges!" grunted Sandy. "I like that, considering everything."

"Sandy, if I go away, will you make me a small allowance until I get something to do, until I can earn money for myself?"

Sandy's head came up with a sudden jerk, like a jumping-jack from its box. There was no sleep in his eyes now.

"Will I *what*?" he roared incredulously.

Patiently she repeated it. "Will you make me a small allowance, sufficient for my needs, until I can be self-supporting?"

"Are ye quite mad?"

"No : I believe I am only beginning to see things sanely. Let us not labour the point, Sandy. The question is will you, or will you not, help me to find my career, if we part amicably?"

"*Career?* Imphm!" Sandy looked at her. "I ken weel what your career would be."

"Answer me, please, Sandy."

"Damn it all!" said Sandy, suddenly losing patience. "No, I will not. Do you think I'm going to let you trapes about the country like your sister Jeanie? *Career!* She was a' for a career, wasn't she, wi' those old mud figures, and her raving about sculpture? Your auld father is to blame for putting those ideas into your heads. It was not respectable, anyway, and you think I'm going to be a fule, do ye, and," sneering an imitation of her voice, "make you an allowance? And you stumping all over the country, looking for a career! I've heard that story before. I ken weel whaur it would end."

At first she had seemed not to understand. Her lips parted in amaze, and then in piteous fear and incredulity.

"You'll listen to me now, I fancy. You've had your say"—oh, this reiteration of words—"now I'll hae mine, if ye please. I'm sick of this nonsense, and so I tell ye straight. I'll hae no mair of it. This is a respectable hoose and no wife o' mine goes out of it trapesing about the country."

He nodded his head at her in emphasis. "I should have thought you'd had enough talk of careers in your family, considering everything," very slowly and deliberately, "considering everything. Ye might think over that, and while ye're thinkin' o't, ye might also appreciate that ye were lucky in the circumstances to get a guid husband, and to hae a hame like this——"

Memory came down on her like a vast, flooding wall of water, muddy and swirling about her, in the light of Sandy's words. All she had not known before, all she had shrunk from asking about Jeanie, all was plain to her now. Sandy was making it very plain. For that moment he dominated. He bent down all her pride and strength.

"And one would have thought ye would be grateful," Sandy was saying now. "Has my father ever said a

word to ye about it? No! Has Christina ever said one word or given even a sign that she knew? No!"

She had swept up a shawl that hung over the bedrail and had thrown it about her shoulders. Her face was terribly white, her eyes piteous, hunted. She stumbled like one blind as she made for the door.

"You can go downstairs and think o't," flung Sandy after her. "Just think ower things and you'll hae a better grip o' life and mair appreciation o' the folk in it. And when ye come back, it will be in a different mood, let's hope."

He turned over with an affectation of one wearied with discussion and anxious to sleep. Perhaps he did drift into sleep, for as a rule it came to him easily and quickly.

He pulled the blankets over his head and muttered: "It will do her guid to sit down there alane and think a bit."

He was righteously aware that she was nervous of the dark. "She winna stay there long," he declared triumphantly. Then he yawned: for he was really very tired.

Eltrym unbolted the front door very quietly. The rain was falling in a monotonous drizzle; slow and cold it beat against her face. The night bent over her, dark and sombre and threatening. There was no place for her in all the world.

In its kennel the dog rattled at its chain, crept out and whined at sight of her, then slunk back into the warmth of shelter, because of the rain and the cold, stinging wind.

Eltrym went down the lane, stumbling in the darkness. When she came to the end of it, short though it was, her knees threatened to give way beneath her. She had to cling to the fence for support. She pressed her face against its wet, cold surface as if for comfort.

How long she stayed there she did not know. It was a night of which she could never afterwards speak. But the voice which had spoken to her as a child, which had come to her many times since, compelled her indoors.

For a while she was deaf to it, deaf to everything. Then she became aware that she was out in the dark drizzling night, her drenched hair about her face, her soaked shawl trailing from her poor shoulders. She was alone in the wet and the cold and the misery, and even the wretched mongrel in the kennel had shrunk from accompanying her.

And up in his room Sandy would be sleeping a victorious and righteous sleep. He would feel he had done his duty. He had given her "facts." He had had his say and had shown, by the length of time he had kept back the knowledge he had imparted, that he was a tolerant, kind and worthy husband, a man above men, willing to overlook and forgive.

"Go indoors! Go indoors!" whispered the voice.

The rain, with its slanting wind-flung arrows, had pierced the thin fabric of her dress. The water drifted down on her slim, rounded breasts. They were damp and chill against her sodden gown. The wind shrieked at her, hounded her back. She returned to the house because in all that dark and desolate night there was nowhere else in the world to go. She went back, head bowed, distraught and shivering. She crept upstairs and into the room.

Sandy opened his eyes to see her standing at the foot of the bed. For a moment she seemed the wild figment of a dream. Her hair hung dank about her shoulders.

The thought that she had been out in the rain filtered into Sandy's sleep-drugged mind, and he sat up and looked at her. For a moment his tongue refused adequate expression.

She looked at him with the eyes of a beaten dog. "Sandy, I must go home to-morrow; my father is ill."

Sandy stared at her. He saw more clearly now the state of her sodden clothes, the wet bosom of her dress, her white distraught face. She had actually been out in the rain. His mind instinctively whirled to doctor's bills—to neighbours' gossip—who knows who might

Earthware

have seen her? Where had she been? What a position for a respectable man to be in!

He jumped out of bed. "Where hae ye been? Hae ye gaun clean off your heid? How lang hae ye been oot?"

She put up her hands to her ravaged face. She seemed to brush away something incredible and terrifying.

"Sandy, I don't know—I am tired——" Her eyes looked down at her wet disordered garments, at the shawl Sandy had taken from her shoulders. "It must be raining."

"Ay!" he interrupted with subdued irony, "I should say it must be. Do ye no ken the hour?"

She was beginning with feeble fingers to disrobe. She felt so weary, so unutterably weary. Her poor mind, too, seemed to be fumbling and slow like her fingers.

Sandy stood off, hard and bitter, making no further attempt to help her. Why should he? Did *he* tell her to go out into the rain and make a fool of herself? His eyes watched her every movement. In his brain seethed a torrent of words that would flow forth, like lava, when the right hour came.

She had some difficulty with her shoe-laces. Save us, how the woman fumbled as if her fingers were made of butter! At last impatiently he knelt and helped her. As his hand touched hers he felt her fingers cold and chilled. Och! if she fell ill she had brought it on herself, she had brought it about senselessly and deliberately and expressly to annoy him.

She was shivering as she got into bed. She crept instinctively into the warmth of the place where Sandy had lain and curled herself up like a child. With half-sobbing breaths she drifted into sleep.

Sandy stood, clad in his pyjamas, by the fireplace. The wind came down the chimney and now and again a spat of soot fell on him.

Sandy looked at his wife's head showing, shining and fair, above the bedclothes. He tiptoed nearer and

listened to her breathing. Then, and only then, he put a dressing-gown about him and went ever so quietly downstairs, treading cautiously so as not to disturb a soul in the sleeping household.

He came back with wood and firelighters and a supply of coal. He paused at the door and listened. Not a soul stirred. Not a voice asked what he was doing at that hour.

Sandy closed the door as cautiously and lit a fire. When it was cheerfully blazing he drew up the chairs in front of it and, covering them with some sheets of newspaper, he hung over them the garments his wife had worn. He shook his head many times, his lips still tight and grim.

Just look at those stockings! Absurd! They're rubbish at the best of times. It was like her to buy them, and now look at the state they were in, absolutely sodden! He had a good mind to throw them into the fire.

He lifted his head. He thought she had spoken. But she was only moaning.

He waited until the clothes were dry and then he hung them up carefully. The light fell on his face, and it was very set and stern.

His wife murmured his name as he crept into bed beside her. Her hand had gone groping out for him, as if even loneliness and the dark sky bent over her in sleep.

She spoke and he said curtly:

"Well?"

But she was only muttering in her sleep.

"It's a long way to the bend—to the bend of the road," and she sighed as if her feet were weary with the walking. With the sigh she half seemed to wake:

"Put—your arm about me—Sandy."

After a prolonged sigh as of one resigned Sandy complied. It was all very well, but he wasn't going to forget like that. He couldn't forget if she could. To-night's experience had left a mark on his memory. He would let her know that to-morrow evening, he would

so. He would be master in his own house, and there would be no more of this tomfoolery. Then something tender rose in him almost against his will. In the leaping firelight the little head, turned away from him, shone and rippled like gold against the pillow. The hair was curling in spite of the damp that still clung to it. Her closed eyes with their long dark lashes were wet with rain or tears. They stirred something deep and ineffably tender in him. He bent over and kissed her, very gently, lest she should awake and become aware of this weakness.

In the morning when she woke he was dressing himself and, as usual after any quarrel, was noisily opening and closing drawers and finding difficulties with his collars and studs.

He was gloomily and studiously silent towards her. He never spoke until he was marching out of the room and down to breakfast. Then he turned loftily :

"You will find your clothes in the wardrobe—they are quite dry now. I had to light a fire and sit up half the night to see to that."

His face was very angry and red. Why didn't she say something? Why did she just look at him like that? Damn it all! Was it *his* fault that she had gone trapesing down the lane? Why did she look at him in that enigmatical way so that one could not know of what she was thinking?

His mouth set grimly.

"You and I will have a talk about this when I come home to-night," said Sandy, with more than ever the air of a schoolmaster to the scapegrace of the class.

She started and something beseeching came immediately into her face. Her eyes appealed as they turned towards him, following him as he strode to the door.

"Sandy," she began. "Dearie, I——"

"Oh, it's a different cry this morning, isn't it? I kenned that would happen."

"But, Sandy——"

He snapped open the case of his watch and looked at the time.

"It can keep until to-night," he said, and he opened the door to pass out.

Her lips quivered and the appeal died out of her eyes, the wistfulness from her face. It became strong and expressionless and to Sandy's mind stubborn and impenitent. He banged the door behind him as a sign of how little he cared for that sort of thing.

He fumed to himself going downstairs. At least she might have apologised. She could have said "I am sorry," but no, she must look at him like that, and make him feel that the whole thing was trivial, ridiculous, and not worth discussing. No! She must be taught—irresponsible, feather-headed if lovable creature—that it did not pay to yield to these moods and tantrums, these hysterical impulses. As a punishment, he had not gone up to kiss her good-bye as was his wont.

She heard him go out of the gate whistling with ostentatious cheerfulness.

She looked at the closed door as if it were emblematic of something beyond her control.

"Oh, Sandy!" she whispered, and the tears were in her eyes.

CHAPTER XXII

MICHAEL HARDIE FINDS THE SEA

*O ships that sailed the pathless seas,
O Love that never knew. . . .*

ETHEL STONEHOUSE.

ELTRYM had left a letter for Sandy with Christina, and he read it in the kitchen, amid the clatter of cups and preparations for tea :

"Sandy, dear, I have gone home for a few days to see my father, and also to think over things. It will be the first time we have been separated since our marriage and perhaps it will be good for both of us. Don't come for me. Let me return as soon as I feel I must. And I will try to be a good wife to you, Sandy, I really will. Don't be harsh with me, and don't be angry with me because I felt I must go before you came back this evening. I could not endure any more nagging."

"Nagging—*me* nagging!" exclaimed Sandy indignantly to himself. "Well—I like that, I must say. *Me* nagging!"

He was much affected by the sullen sense of injury that swept over him and the non-appreciation shown by his wife of the portrait he had in imagination drawn of himself.

"Nagging," she went on, "*makes me almost physically ill. Oh, Sandy, I cannot tell you just what it has come to mean to me. I feel I must run away from it, as I wanted to run away from Bald Gourie, and then you came and everything seemed different.*"

"I should think it did," commented Sandy.

"And so I feel it is best to go away for a while, even if my father did not need me, and I feel sure he does. You see, mother never quite understood him, just as sometimes I have felt I do not understand you, but everything will be different when I come back."

"Ay, it will be," said Sandy. He was greatly annoyed, indeed, as well as hurt that she should have gone like that. She had actually run away like a coward, because she could not face what she knew she deserved.

And he, all the way home, had mentally recited a firm and candid review of events that would enable her to see things in their true and proper perspective as he saw them. On the principle that an unruly wife and a drunken man demand similar treatment in the matter of a deferred lecture, he had kept back that morning all he well might have said then, or even the night before.

For on the aforesaid principle, the morning-after-the-night-before feeling bred remorse and an attitude of humility and therefore receptivity of mind. And now she had gone!

He stamped upstairs, and the room was strangely empty. It was so unusually tidy, too—not a vestige to remind him of her was there. He opened the drawers and the wardrobes and considered what she had taken. Not very much; evidently she intended to come back in a day or two.

The lilac frock glowed softly from the dark, cedar-scented depths of the huge wardrobe. Its frivolous frills stirred in the wind from the window. Sandy shut the door disgustedly on it. Fifty good shillings there, gone for good and all.

"Eltrym had a letter the day from somewhaur," said his father at the evening meal. (Well; she hadn't mentioned that in her letter to him, anyway.) "I suppose it must hae been from Bald Gourie, for she seemed excited over it and told me she must go and see her father, and she went off by the first boat she could catch

and wouldna wait for ye. She telt me she had talked about it a' wi' ye the nicht before, but ye had forgotten to leave the money for the fare. She lookit sae awfu' worrit, the puir lassie, that I was glad when she went oot and into the cab."

"So you lent her the money," said Sandy. His brows met.

His father nodded. "That's a' richt. I suppose ye'll gang to fetch her back. Ye can tell Michael I'm sorry to hear he's ill."

Sandy grunted something. He had no idea of going to Bald Gourie, but he did not say so. No! He was not going to give in like that. He would not trail over the country at his wife's heels as he had foolishly done that night they walked to Craigie Burn. It was all very well, but no more of that nonsense, thank you. No! he would bide his time, and right glad would she be to come back in a penitential mood. Like the stern and silent man he was he would wait and make no sign.

* * * * *

In the sick-room at Bald Gourie Eltrym sat very still as the day died over the hills.

Her father slept and there was no need for her to stay indoors. The wind stirred the checked curtains at the diamond-paned windows and rustled the chintz drapings of the bed. The voices of laughing children drifted up from the road by the shining water.

But she wanted just to lie back in that old curiously carved armchair with its faded scarlet cushions, just to lie there, her face pressed against its cushions, and think things over.

Thought had been so confused of late. Even in the quiet of this dear, shabby room it did not come clearly. That poor pale face so pitifully gaunt on the pillow, the straggling wisps of grey hair—the tears came to her eyes and her lips trembled. Dear old landsman who yet had babbled in his delirium of ships at sea and fishing-boats sailing by with the sun flashing on red and rust-brown sails and gleaming nets! Was that all

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the visions had brought him which he had dreamed as he strode behind the plough with the brown, dark-furrowed earth bending over and the light fading on Loch Fyne?

Strange that he, of the Glesca Irish and early memories of dark slum ways and crowded tenements, should be wandering now through sea villages in wild, far Galway that he had never seen. What old crone, crouching over the dying embers, had croaked of these things in a day gone by?

For in his delirium he had been free, one with the wind and the water, and the quiet harbour and its home-bound boats with the flashing of silver deep in their holds.

She bent over and touched very gently the emaciated hand that clutched the bedclothes. He half opened his eyes and murmured:

"*Jeanie!*"

Then he slept again.

She leaned back in her chair, the window a little open beside her, and the air blowing softly in and the light of the sunset beating like a slow tide against the panes.

Sandy had not yet written. Leezie had gone to shop at Strachur, with instructions to call at the post office. There had been no letters.

She had told her mother that as Sandy was coming soon she did not expect he would write. There was nothing to write about, she had added. But here in her room things had assumed a different aspect. Sandy was angry, of course, and sullen. He was sulking. She knew now instinctively that he had no intention of coming to fetch her. He would be saying that he would let her gang her ain gait. He had pride, he had, even if *she* did not recognise it.

She sighed. Her head fell back wearily. How like children they were, she and Sandy, and yet at times she felt so old!

The loneliness that had been gathering force with each day since she had come back to her old home

rushed on her with renewed volume. She tried not to think how far she had gone on the road of Life and Disillusionment since she last slept in that little room upstairs with its window looking out at the mountains. Yet the house and everything in it seemed unchanged. Her mother still bustled about the house finding innumerable duties; Leezie still idled at every opportunity, and dishes still slipped from her clumsy fingers. There was a new farm hand now and, though he was old and married, Leezie still dawdled and laughed vacantly and wasted her time when he was in the vicinity.

The house itself stood up grim, remote, all the things in it unchanged—the dark-panelled passages, the seldom-used hall door, the best rooms with their heavy oak beams and dark furniture and antimacassars and gaily coloured wool flowers of a bygone age. There was the kitchen redolent of soapsuds with its scrubbed table and its bright red-bricked floor, its checked curtains at the window, and from the shelves of the old dresser the blue delf plates glimmered dully.

The grandfather's clock tick-tocked and cleared its throat asthmatically. "We are no changed, you see, we are no changed. It is you who have changed."

Was that it, after all? Was it she who had changed, who had become discontented, dull, and older than her years, who saw life shifting by and had lost nearly all desire to put out a hand to stay it? Where were those old, breathless dreams that had kept her company and ousted loneliness? They had flown away from Glen-side in the very solid, practical atmosphere that had no time for dreams, but now they came back thronging around her. They came, like well-remembered friends, whispering by her. Some of them talked of the roads by the hill and water, roads that wandered on and on, that were not hemmed in and overshadowed, but were free to the sun and the air and the sky.

But she was no longer a little child in a worn red frock, and a faded tartan shawl for head-gear, wandering over the hills with the sheep and an old yellow sheep-dog barking behind her. She was a married

woman now and settled. The little girl had gone and her foolish playing.

But the old clock in the kitchen croaked and struck the hour loudly and challengingly, and said to her contemptuously :

"Ay, but *ye* will never grow up. Hae they not all told ye that? I ken it weel. Ye'll never grow up. Ye'll aye be a *puir* fulish thing!"

Oh, but she *must* be different! When she went back—for she must go back; even without words her mother's attitude showed her that—she would be different. Already because of the coldness behind her mother's manner, since Eltrym had spoken more impulsively than her wont, she knew she must go soon, and she would go to-morrow. She would not have her mother say that Sandy did not intend to come.

"These things happen in a' married lives," her mother had said, "and a woman's a *puir* feckless body if she cannot cope wi' them. Anyhow, ye maunna stay here to mak' mair trouble by your absence. Ye've got a guid husband, a fine, respectable man, and a comfortable roof over your head, and no worry about work such as is my lot. I'll hae nae mair nonsense in this hoose."

She had been swung back in that moment into the years when she was a bit bairn cowering in the firelit shadows by the clock. A like panic had swept over her. Her breath had come fast in a similar way. The old terrors of childhood had seized upon her.

When Sandy came her mother and he would talk over things for her good. They would not say much, of course—that was not their way with something that intimately concerned them both—but a word would be dropped here and there, a sly allusion here and there—

"As a bairn there was nae doing onything wi' her at a'."

Sandy would say nothing, or very little then. But afterwards in an unguarded moment it would be cast up at her :

"So I ken—your mither said as much, there was nae doing onything wi' ye."

Yes! She must go home. She could do nothing here. Even her father seldom knew her. He wanted little attention now that the case seemed beyond human aid.

She would go back and start life again with Sandy as if nothing had happened. All married people did that, she supposed, or else how could the world go on? And some day they would have a home to themselves and things would be easier.

She had thought that Sandy might write this to her. But no letter came.

She felt lonely, utterly isolated. She missed Sandy more than ever she had deemed possible. Her thoughts went to Glenside.

Christina on this very afternoon would be airing Sandy's flannels. This was the day reserved for that ritual, when the rope creaked on the pulleys, and the rods from the ceiling were lowered, and the flannels and under-garments of the household despoiled themselves thereon. The built-up fire would fling ruddy shadows across them and on the wall, and in his corner the old, old man would be stretching his yellow, knotted hands towards them and muttering and chattering.

Her eyes turned to her father. He was lying in the ancient walnut four-poster with its carved top-pieces and draping of faded chintz. She saw then that he was awake and his eyes were on her face, those kind weak eyes, half peering as if the light were always dim of late.

He spoke hoarsely but without any trace of delirium :
"Why, it's wee Èltrym, isn't it?"

"Yes, father." She bent over him and touched his poor wan cheeks. "Can I get you anything?"

He shook his head. "Not now. I'll no long be wantin' much mair." He closed his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them he was looking beyond her out of the window where the great mountain towered and the sky was a sea of rose and flame.

"It should be pleasant going," he said simply.

He felt her tears on his hand, and he turned, unaware

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that he had spoken aloud. He stroked weakly her bright hair as she knelt beside him.

"So ye came to see your auld father, after all. I knew ye would come tae the puir scapegrace. We were aye chums." His hand rested heavily on her head as if in blessing. Then he spoke again :

"And ye're no happy. I kent that weel when I saw ye. I've lain awake a lang time watching ye—— Ah, weel!" he sighed, "there's mebbe naebody very happy in life; we must just put up wi' it; but I dinna like to think my wee Eltrym is no happy."

She lifted her head bravely: "It will pass."

He turned his eyes towards her, looked at her face for a long moment. "Are ye quite sure, lassie? Tell the auld man. Perhaps he'll understand mair than ye think."

She sobbed, her head lowered, her bright hair touching his shoulder.

He spoke half to himself: "I was afraid—afraid—but it seemed for the best." Then aloud: "Tell me, where is Sandy? Is he here?"

She told him the truth. His grey head nodded now and again. When she went on to tell him of that last scene, when she had asked him to make her an allowance, he turned his head from the dying sunset and looked at her. He said no word until she finished.

Then he spoke of the poems. "'The Field o' Stars!' Ay, I ken weel what ye meant." He was silent for a moment. "And the sky like a sea, and sometimes the wee boats settin' oot, an' rockin' to the tide—oh, I've gone wi' them at times."

He touched her face gently with his thin, weak fingers.

"And ye hae a buke o' them! A dochter o' mine! And sae a' the dreams will no be wasted, after a'—— Maybe ye'll be doin' what I wanted to dae——" He sighed.

He lay still for a while, his lips moving though no words came. The last of the sunset died slowly out of the sky. Then he spoke :

"When dae ye go back?"

"To-morrow, father."

He turned his eyes towards her, peering at her as if the light in the room were suddenly dim. He seemed to have a difficulty in finding his words:

"Ye will gae back—— It is weel—but I am afraid—afraid——"

He did not say of what he was afraid, his voice tapering off into silence, and she thought he slept.

But as she moved from her cramped, kneeling position he spoke, his voice suddenly strong:

"Are ye there, Eltrym?"

She bent over him, her soft cheek against his.

"There's an auld cabinet in this room—ye canna see it, for it is set back o' the panelling, but if ye feel, just to your left ye will find a keyhole in the wall."

She found it after some delay.

"There's no key," he explained. "The key is under the carpet—a guid way under, at the end whaur ye stand. Can ye find it?"

She drew it out and showed him a curiously wrought antique key. She inserted it in the lock under his directions and opened the panelled door that had seemed part of the dark wall.

There was nothing much in the receptacle—a few papers, some boyish relics of Glasgow school-days, and in the far corner a dirty canvas bag.

"Is the wee bag there? Bring it tae me, and shut the door after ye."

The bag though small was heavy. A faint jingling sound came from it as she dusted it before laying it on the white-and-rose counterpane. He made no effort to untie the string with which it was bound. Indeed, he seemed exhausted as he lay back on his pillows. But his hand struggled towards that of his daughter. He spoke strange words.

"I dinna know if I'm doing wrong. God forgive me if I am! for Jeanie had dreams." He began to wander. "But ye must go, Jeanie, if ye must—and I ken ye'll come back famous to your auld father—and I'll be

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lookin' in the papers about ye and the wee figures. I ken weel Bald Gourie is nae place for ye, my wee Jeanie——"

He was wandering on a road she could not see, and looked so deathly white that a kind of terror seized her. She bent over him, her lips against his face, and called him back.

He answered, but his voice sounded as from a long way off :

"It's wee Eltrym ! " His hands fumbled until they touched the bag, and with a great effort he turned his head and his tired eyes opened.

"Take it," he said. "I want ye to take it; pit it awa' in your room noo, and if the day comes when ye are in need, use it."

But she shook her head. "You'll need it, father. Mother will need it."

A chuckle escaped him then. "That will she not. She's the fine, clever woman that." He nodded his head in admiration. "She's nae sae poor as her tongue's crying would be haeing ye think. There's a wee nestie somewhere, for a' she threeps she's sae poor. Tak' what the auld scapegrace gies ye, my wee lassie. It is nae sae muckle, mair siller and coppers than gowd—but it's for yoursel'."

She took it as he had directed and insisted. He heaved a sigh of content as she lifted the bag and walked to the door.

"God go wi' ye!" he said, very clearly, and then turned over and seemed to sleep.

As Eltrym tapped gently at his door shortly afterwards, her mother answered. She had gone to sit with him, taking some mending and darning.

"He's asleep," she whispered. "I'll stay here a wee bittie."

"Can I help ye ? "

The mother shook her head scornfully. She had no opinion of her daughter's darning ability.

"Ye can gang for a walk tae see if the sheep are a'richt. I'm no sae sure o' the new hand."

So over the hillside again Eltrym had gone. The last of the colour and the glow had almost left the sky. As she reached the top of the hill she saw far away a pearl-grey cloud like a ship, its sails of fire. Even as she looked the glow slowly died. The ship moved on before the wind, over the mountain, over the rim of the world. She stood and watched it, and there came to her a loneliness and a sadness beyond all words.

She turned and went back, because she could not bear to stand on that desolate hillside any longer.

She would write to Sandy straight away. She would walk to Strachur and post it that night. He would get it before she reached home. She would make sure by posting the letter to him at the school. She would write and tell him how she shrank from anything approaching another quarrel, would beg him to be kind and endure with her for a while, with all her faults. They would begin again with life as fair as it seemed on that morning when, leaning down from the quaint window, she had seen him with the roses.

They should make a fresh start. She would try to be kind and gentle and not mind Christina's moods. After all, life in a sense had passed Christina by; she would be kind to Christina.

And Sandy's father! They were understanding each other better now. He no longer wished, maybe, that his son had looked nearer home. He had even kissed her that morning when she went away, and he had bade her heartily come back as soon as she could.

She must be to blame, as Sandy said. She was no longer a foolish child, but a grown-up woman with responsibilities.

Sandy would be glad to see her again, she knew. It would be as if they had never quarrelled. She would write such a loving letter, full of such good resolutions, and she would beg him to meet her at the train. She would choose a boat-train he could meet after school hours. And so she hastened down the hill and into the warm-bricked kitchen with its subdued glow of many

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colours and the firelight playing on the kind, friendly face of the old clock.

There were pen and ink on the kitchen mantelshelf, and she hunted out some notepaper. She smiled, because it had a spray of blue forget-me-nots in the corner, cheap, scented paper that without doubt belonged to the amorous Leezie. How Sandy would smile when he saw it! Anyhow, he would know that it was not his wife's taste.

She wrote the letter in the front room that had once been Sandy's. Because she seemed to see him standing there on the hearthrug, his dark curly head thrown back, his pipe in his mouth, or in his hand as a demonstrator of "facts," she wrote very tenderly. She had blotted and signed it when there came an interruption. Leezie hurled herself, rather than walked, into the room.

"Oh, Mistress MacKunnon, I hae been lookin' for ye everywhaur; I hae been looking for ye a' ower the hill."

She threw her apron over her head, and burst into incoherent wailing.

Eltrym knew at once. She saw herself standing again on the bleak hill-top, watching the ship that sailed slowly on before the wind with its sails of flame.

Her father had found the Sea at last.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DOOR CLOSES

*I cannot plough the furrows straight
There are too many graves.*

M. FORREST.

ELTRYM did not return to Paisley on the appointed day, after all. It was five days later when, carrying a suit-case, she walked down the garden-path at Glenside.

She wore a black dress which a Strachur dressmaker had laudably but not altogether successfully made in a hurry.

Sandy was not at the station. She should not have expected it, any more than she should have expected Sandy to come to her father's funeral, for Sandy looked on his work as a sacred duty not to be lightly disregarded. Appointments he would not break in any conceivable circumstances. He would have said, "Death! Well, we all have to die. I'm not afraid to die and I don't want folk to bother over me when I do die. I couldn't help your father by coming, could I? If the poor old chap were alive and sent for me, and I had been able to come, I would have come."

And so here she was. The suit-case had been heavier and the journey from the station to Glenside much longer than she had anticipated, or perhaps she was more than usually weary.

She was very pale, anyhow, and there were dark circles under her eyes as she came up the pathway that afternoon. She knocked, and there was a perceptible pause as if due to inspection from the drawing-room window.

Then the door opened and Christina stood on the threshold.

She said, as Eltrym had known she would say, and without any emotion one way or another :

“Ay, so ye’re back.”

She stood aside for her sister-in-law to pass, and perhaps it was Eltrym’s fancy that to-day she looked grimmer, more gaunt and more forbidding than ever.

Eltrym’s heart ached but she said not a word. She set down her bag in the hall and, wearily removing her hat, hung it up on one of the coat-hooks.

Unwittingly she hung it up on the peg sacred to her father-in-law’s coat and hat. Christina remedied this small matter promptly but without comment.

Eltrym went out into the kitchen. The table was set and in less than an hour now Sandy would be in. She stared miserably at the fire in the grate and choked a little. Her mother had received a formal note of sympathy from the whole Mackinnon family, who appeared deeply grieved with her in her loss. The phraseology was evidently culled from cards once sent to themselves in their own bereavement. Sandy had added that he hoped Eltrym was well and that he himself was very busy, and regretted it was impossible, etc., etc.

And now she was back again, and the boat journey—during which she had pictured the meeting with Sandy and what she would say—was over. Sandy had not met her. She ought to have remembered, however, that this was an afternoon when he gave a special lesson to a private pupil on his way home.

She stood very still beside the fire, looking patiently before her. Christina bustled about and clattered things irritably at intervals, but Eltrym did not care. She had got past that.

By and by she heard Christina grumbling over something in the scullery. Eltrym sighed because in this room she could not think clearly, and wandered into the drawing-room.

Its hardness, its hideousness, struck her anew. How *could* people have plush atrocities like that? How could they endure aspidistras in yellow and green or blue vases? The poor plants even seemed to resent it,

they stared so desolately and hopelessly out of the bow windows. The room seemed to shriek at her to-day, with its violent clashings of furniture and colours. The mustard-coloured plush made her almost ill. The heavy, sombre wall-paper was depressing beyond words. She went into the hall, lifted her bag and carried it upstairs. But for a while she did not unpack it. She sat on the chair by the empty fireplace—that chair where she used to sit and nurse her baby—and stared with dazed eyes in front of her.

How her head ached! How strange that all the resolutions she had made had deserted her as soon as the door opened and Christina said in her flat voice, "So ye're back!"

Eltrym knew she would probably say this to her brother and her father and the servant. It had become simply a matter of habit to one who lacked conversational gifts.

But to-day somehow that reception had jarred. Christina had not altered. She was just as she was when she, Eltrym, had left. How stupid of her, anyway, to expect Christina to alter, to abandon the habits of a lifetime!

Was it the few days' absence which had made her so keenly sensitive to the things she had imagined herself grown accustomed to—Christina and her ways, the meals in the kitchen, the kitchen itself as a salon, and the fire lit in the drawing-room only for state occasions!

How could she expect things to be altered? Glenside would go on as if she had never been away, as if she had never come back. There would be tea, the usual "high" tea at the usual hour, the usual greetings, the slow passing of the time, the prayers at a quarter past nine, the striking of the hour for bed.

She looked round the room. The bed was all arranged with its elaborate furnishing, with the counterpane, and the nightgown cases that were to be lifted off and neatly folded away, and to-morrow to be unfolded and put back on the bed again.

There were Sandy's practical, black-backed brushes

along with the comb and mirror. Not a thing out of order, not a coat out of its place! And then her mind, revolving slowly because it seemed stunned, told her that it was time she unpacked and put her things in order also, her brush and comb on the dressing-table, her hairpin box under the looking-glass.

She must unpack her clothes, hang them up in the big wardrobe, and take up life again just where she had left it off. Was that not what, doubly lonely in Bald Gourie after her father's death, she had wanted to do? Why hesitate? Why feel she had no will to resume the trivial round?

She rose slowly and opened her suit-case. She began to lay out its contents on the bed, forgetting that she might crumple the counterpane and incur Christina's housewifely anger.

There, at one side, was the canvas bag her father had given her, his last gift, which she was to use in any hour of need.

Mechanically she untied the string about the mouth and poured out the contents on the bed. There were gold and silver and copper, and a jade brooch that had belonged to Jeanie Hardie.

The brooch lay, a splash of soft green against the curious background. How strange it should be there, hoarded with the money, on the top of the money, as she knew now!

And the jade brooch recalled days when Jeanie and she had trod the ways of Bald Gourie together, when they talked of ebony-hued horses and nodding plumes and glittering harness—— The green brooch spoke of more—it spoke of the bend of the road and Jeanie going out of sight. "Just around the bend o' the road," whispered Jeanie. "We maun keep on and on until we come tae it. The road may be lang but there's a turn in it at last."

Everything had been round the Bend of the Road—wonderful things!

"But they never happened," Eltrym said in sudden passion to the jade brooch. "They will never happen."

And the brooch seemed to answer as it lay there with the light playing over it :

"Ye have never turned the Bend o' the Road yet."

She took up the trinket and placed it in the wardrobe drawer. She could not bear to look at it. It revived too many memories that throbbed and hurt like an old wound that has never quite healed. And as she opened the wardrobe door the lilac dress caught her eye as it had Sandy's eye, that frivolous dainty frock that had caused a row.

How these inanimate things brought back scenes connected with them—the day in the draper's shop, the young man with the elaborate moustache who was disposed to attend solely to her, to the unconsidered neglect of other customers! How absurd the whole thing was! How absurd that she had ever bought the frock at all!

She would pack it away in the suit-case and stow that away in the attic, and then it would be out of sight and forgotten. While it stayed there, every time he opened the wardrobe Sandy would see it. She threw it on the bed to wait for packing. And as she stood there, the green brooch again in her hand, she heard the gate open.

A sudden panic seized her. She could not face Sandy alone just yet. If she were alone here and he came up she knew she would ask him why he had not come to the station, why, for once in his life, he could not have spared at least half an hour to see her home.

She did not want to ask these questions. Pride rose in her. She would make no mention of the matter at all. She heard steps in the hall below and, with a sense of relief, her father-in-law's voice.

On the bed the money still lay, the canvas bag yawning open. Hastily she gathered it together. There were a few sovereigns, a heap of silver and some coppers, perhaps eight or ten pounds in all. Poor old man! He had given all he had to give.

Because he had hoarded Jeanie's brooch she must not put it away out of sight. For his sake, for Jeanie's, she

would wear it. She pinned it then and there into place at her breast.

The old man's voice was calling her, and she left her unpacking and went downstairs.

He was early, it seemed, and he had ordered a special cup of tea.

"We'll have it noo," he said to Christina. "The lassie needs it, I ken." Her heart warmed to him for that.

Christina made no comment. The father did not ply his daughter-in-law with questions. It was his way to wait for information. But she had not been communicative. She did not speak, for instance, of a topic that Christina would have found interesting, the last words and looks and symptoms of the deceased. Eltrym never mentioned her father.

She sat in her black dress, the jade brooch looking greener than ever. Christina thought it was very bad taste indeed for her to be wearing it. Sandy came in while they were at tea, and it was the first thing that caught his eye. He kissed his wife warmly enough, perhaps sure she had had her lesson, perhaps touched by her pallor and the black frock.

"So you're back again." (How like Christina he looked and spoke at times!)

He touched the brooch with his finger.

"Where did you get that?" He strove to introduce a touch of lightness into the reunion. "Another bargain?"

The colour wavered in his wife's face. They were looking at her, amused at Sandy's allusion, ready to laugh and loosen the tension her mourning justified.

"It is a brooch that belonged to my sister Jeanie."

No one said anything. Christina stared, then her face went red and she tossed her head, the father drank his tea, and Sandy compressed his lips.

When Eltrym went upstairs, however, Sandy followed and his brow was black.

"A nice thing that to say," he blurted out almost before they were over the threshold.

"It was the truth. Did you want me to lie about it?"

"No, but I don't want you to wear the brooch."

"Why not, Sandy?"

"You know the reason."

"Has it anything to do with you or your father or Christina, Sandy?"

"It has everything to do with it. I won't have it. That's straight out from the shoulder."

"Very well." She seemed silently to come to some decision as she took off the brooch and looked at it intently. "You shall not be called on to endure it."

He was glad that she was so sensible. After all, what else could she expect than the proper attitude he had taken up in the matter?

She went over to the bed and, laying down the brooch beside the lilac dress, began to unpack. Sandy wandered up and down the room restlessly.

"Will you be long?"

She shook her head. "No! I have only these few things to fold, Sandy."

Even then she was carrying some of them to the drawers.

Sandy nodded: "Don't be long, then. I'm going downstairs." He hesitated near her. "I got your letter. We will talk over things to-night, eh, dearie?" And he tweaked a stray lock of her hair as she passed.

As she bent on her knees by the open drawers he came back to her, bent over her, then pulled her suddenly to her feet.

"I'm glad you're back again," he said thickly. His face was close to her. His lips pressed hers hotly. "We will begin again, Eltrym. We will begin all over again, and of course I forgive you. I missed you very much."

His breath, warm and thick on her face, filled her with an inexplicable sense of nausea. How tightly he held her! The lips that pressed hers were like sudden fire as he bent her head back, far back, and kissed her. "We will have a new honeymoon. We will begin all over again, and we will baith be full of good resolu-

tions. You'll be different, I know, from Kirstie and faither," said Sandy. And then as suddenly he relinquished her, as if ashamed of this display of emotion in one of iron control, and went out. But he whistled cheerily as he went downstairs.

Alone in the room his wife stood still and silent. She had pressed her two hands, clenched tightly, against her cheeks in a curious gesture. Her eyes travelled round the room with a queer hunted look. The green jade brooch caught her eye and held it. She was fighting against a sense of physical repulsion, and now the brooch gleamed back at her, speaking of dreams, of love above the world, of the field of stars.

The Bend of the Road—how soon had she come to it! It was there, she could see it now very clearly. It must have been there for a long, long time and she had not known. Her feet had been on the road, but she had not looked ahead. She had been lost in the shadows that bent over it.

And now, all at once, she had come to a pass where she could not go on. *She could not!*

Sandy had gone out of the gate and away. He was off to a night-class and he would not be home until almost ten.

She stood, her hands still pressed to her cheek, and stared at the jade brooch, and the lilac dress, and the things scattered over the bed.

Among them was one of the figures Jeanie had made—poor figures of earth and clay. She had brought it with her, partly because it was the last perfect one left, partly because it was a representation of Love, a woman with wings poised above the world. She took it up and its pitiful inadequacy stirred her beyond words.

Poor Jeanie! Love for her had crumbled at a touch when she sought it, had broken as this poor figure now broke in unsteady fingers.

Eltrym laid the pieces in the grate.

"Just—earthware," she whispered.

She went to the window and the pointed roofs of the

houses across the way frowned at her. The sky was fading behind them and dusk fell apace.

"How I hate this street!" Eltrym said, turning away, and then, as she looked round her room: "How I hate this house!"

Out of nothing, as it were, the things of this house, of her life within it, beat about her and reasserted claims. They dragged her back into an atmosphere that had suddenly become distasteful. Those few days away had separated her as she had never thought even years might do. She stood as it were with a keen perspective, with a clearer vista opening before her.

She saw to-night and to-morrow and all the days and the nights and the years beyond.

And she said aloud, her hands still clenched: "I cannot bear it," and again very slowly, "I cannot bear it."

Downstairs the long evening was before her. There would be the array of mending, or the basket of darning. There would be the click-click of Christina's needles, the intermittent chuckling and muttering of the old, old man, and her father-in-law reading aloud extracts from the local papers. She must sit with them, and the hands of the clock on the mantel would make passes over its stupid moon-like face.

First it would be eight, and then nine, and then half-past—and then Sandy would be home, Sandy who said no word of love, but had only held her to him in a sudden gust of passion and desire! There would be the whispered words of endearment, the love of a night, and then the days again, on and on——

Oh, she was at the Bend of the Road! If she went blindly, obediently as before on this present road where Fate had flung her and which the law dictated she must follow, she would never, never find the Bend of the Road again!

They would be wondering why she did not come down to her darning and her mending. She tried to go and half-way down she came back. She could not go just yet.

She heard the clock in the hall strike eight gutturally, and began to walk up and down her room like a trapped creature. Why did she feel like this? Why could she not fight against such feelings? Had she not written to Sandy that she would take up life again, and be a good wife to him in every way—in every way? She trembled as she stood in the middle of the room.

How she hated this prison of a house, which to-night seemed to close about her slowly and implacably! It was almost dark in the room, and she searched for the match-box and lit the gas.

The tumbled things on the bed caught her eye, the jade brooch, the lilac frock, and under the frock was the canvas bag and near it that letter from London.

Nine o'clock from the hall below! How quickly the hours passed! She turned and looked at the travelling clock on the mantel and it pointed at five past the hour. The hall clock was often late.

She heard her father-in-law complaining about it now, and Christina's voice was answering.

In another ten or fifteen minutes Christina would be lighting the candles and turning off the gas. The father would come to the foot of the stairs and call her, or perhaps he would climb the stairs and tap at her door.

And she would go down because she must, and with the night's passing the hated road would remain as before. And then, all at once, she was by the bedside packing feverishly, crushing the things anyhow into the suit-case with eager hands.

Perhaps at first she had not been very clear as to her intention, but now she knew.

She wanted sympathy and warmth and friendship. Life called to her to come into the open. She would not miss the Bend of the Road. She would turn down its adventurous lane, come good or ill. Whatever ill it brought could be no worse than satiety of the dull indifference to which otherwise she must commit herself.

The laws of marriage, what were they? She flung

them passionately from her. What right had a few words said in church or chapel to chain two lives together, to build a cage around love? Things had come to such a pass that she could not go on.

Hurriedly the articles were crammed into the suitcase, the lilac frock and the green jade brooch. From the canvas bag she took some of the gold for her almost empty purse.

She turned for one look round the room, the suitcase in her hand. She picked up her cloak and small hat and was ready. She was conscious of no emotion but that of the desire for flight.

And then suddenly her heart beat fast, for a voice called her at the very door.

It was her father-in-law, who had evidently come upstairs for something, perhaps his handkerchief which he had a habit of mislaying. Engrossed in her thoughts she had not heard him pass.

"Eltrym!" He tapped on the door.

She stood stock-still, the suit-case in her hand, her eyes on the door.

If he should open it and come in and see her standing there ready dressed! Her knees nearly gave way.

"Eltrym!" He rattled the handle and spoke louder, a little impatiently. Her heart beat almost to suffocation, and so loud that even if the handle turned she could not have heard.

Then she heard him go downstairs into the kitchen. He said something to Christina, for she heard the murmur of voices.

Would Christina come up? She blew out the light and, slipping to the door, opened it softly, then tiptoed out on to the darkness of the landing.

She waited until she heard his voice, and realised that the reading of the Scriptures had begun. Step by step, ever so slowly, she went down the stairs. One of them creaked and she almost collapsed from sheer nervousness.

But the voice went on:

"The way of transgressors is hard——"

Now she was in the dark hall near the door. Was it Christina who moved in the kitchen?

Eltrym opened the front door and the wind blew up the steps, and outside the world was black almost as pitch. The yellow lights of the street lamps glowed feebly and leaped fitfully.

Down the corridor behind the kitchen the door was blown back with a crash by the wind. She heard Christina's voice suddenly shrill:

"What is it? Who is it?"

Eltrym shut to the door and ran down the path. The wind had swung the gate open and she ran through it and into the street as if she were pursued. The wind buffeted against her as if to beat her back.

"I shall never come back!" she cried to it. "Never! Never!"

The wind shrieked derisively, seeming to say, in Sandy's voice:

"Ay! I think I've heard that before."

She turned the corner and left the dark street behind her. Below was the tramway, and a car flashed past with its orange lights.

When another car came she was in it and away. It rumbled on, and there were a good many people in it, some of whom stared at her and her white face and her black dress.

There was, however, another centre of interest, a drunken woman, quite young and wild-looking, with black matted hair falling frowsily about her face, who was volubly explaining something to her husband over and over again.

"I never took the pund-note," she was reiterating. "I never spent it i' the pub at a'—I lost it, I tell ye." Her shawl fell back from her tousled head and shoulders as she spoke, and showed an indescribably filthy blouse and an unwashed neck. Eltrym found herself shuddering that any woman could descend to such depths of negligence and drunkenness.

The stolid-looking husband, not much older than herself, said nothing. She went raving on about the

pound-note and how that someone might have stolen it from her in the pub, and she jerked her dirty tartan shawl about her thin shoulders and as many times let it drop again.

They got off near Glasgow, the woman still talking, her shawl still slipping from her shoulders and that terribly dirty blouse exposed to the full glare of light. Someone essayed a joke after their departure.

"Yon's a quiet man, eh? He's the safest o' the family."

A fat, comfortable-looking woman laughed. "Wait until he gets her hame. Thae quiet yins are no sae simple as they look."

The eyes of the red-bearded man who had first spoken twinkled: "Eh, wumman! But he winna lift his hand to her."

She looked at him with contempt for his point of view. "Ye think so, do ye?"

"That's so." He smiled at the company. "He'll be like the Irishman. Ye ken what *he* said."

He looked round impressively. "He was a far-sighted man. He kenned weel how to dae wi' women," and his eyes flashed merrily at the comely wife beside him. "Och!" he said, "that Irishman never lifted a hand to a wumman, mate, save in the way o' kindness—he aye used his boot."

Everybody laughed. The conductor poked in his head and said, "Whaur's the joke?" and he clanged his bell and called: "Change here for the Central Station!"

The car stopped and some of the people got off.

Eltrym got off, too, and the conductor handed her the suit-case. The little bell tinkled again.

She stood on the pavement and watched the tram go out of sight. She had not been sure before where she was going but now she knew.

She raised her head and looked at the sky. The wind hurled itself against her, blowing strands of her hair into her eyes.

The night was dark. There were no stars, but for Eltrym the lights of London lit the road.

Part III
THE POTSHERD



CHAPTER XXIV

THE LANE OF ADVENTURE

*. . . . and adventure's lane,
Green with some transient spring and gay with flowers,
Where Life's sundial counts not shadowed hours.*

ETHEL QUINN.

IN a dusty office, high up in one of those modest and squat smoke-grey buildings, wedged in among others newer and more pretentious that grace the Street of Ink, the editor of *The Eaglet* was whistling cheerily as he sharpened his pencil. There was spring in the air, and the sunshine lay level on the street without. It beat even against the dusty window panes of *The Eaglet* office.

With his chair tilted back and balanced alarmingly on two rickety legs, an ancient hat on the back of his grey head, and his feet resting more comfortably than elegantly on a dilapidated desk crowded with books and papers, he was bestowing on the business of pencil-sharpening the close attention which such an operation demands.

It was a task usually allotted to the staff, but that young, short-skirted damsel had been gone over an hour, ostensibly in quest of a bun and a glass of milk, or other hilarious fare provided by the refreshment-rooms in the vicinity of St. Paul's.

There were other shops in the same neighbourhood, and the editor guessed that by now the staff, which had unexpectedly been paid that day, was flattening its snub nose against the panes, entranced eyes bulging with longing, and mouth slowly making revolutions, due partly to ruminations of how far seven shillings could go, and partly to a mysterious sticky compound, without which life, to the staff, was presumably a blank.

The editorial department whistled on unconcernedly. If the staff were not staring in at some window, it would be cheeking the office-boy from an adjacent and equally successful office, or would be breathlessly bending its pig-tailed head over some yellow novel in the ante-chamber.

Yes, verily, it *would* sound much more important, if anyone did call, to explain apologetically that The Staff was out on urgent matters, and refer to the fact that one was short-handed.

"And short-pursed!" And he paused from his whistling long enough to chuckle, sigh, and then smile again, as if it were no great matter. Anyhow, he had health and strength and a sense of humour, *even* if youth and fortune had basely deserted him. Fifty-five—by gad!—one was getting an old stager!

Well, there were five pencils done, quite works of art. He supposed he might do a sixth, and by that time the staff might have graciously decided to return to the scene of its labours.

It would hardly do for him to be out also, in case anyone called.

If anyone called! The solitary occupant of the room, with its glazed door and its "Editorial Department, Strictly Private," inscribed in gilt letters, whistled less cheerily.

No one ever did call. No one was likely to call unless it were a bailiff.

Then his natural buoyancy of spirit asserted itself. Bless my soul, this would never do! Wasn't there that Thingummebob text perched up on the wall before him with its mandate: "Keep on keeping on!"?

And what if he *were* in danger of missing his lunch? He would have to get used to that, and, besides, there was Catherine, who had made a small pile out of that last book of hers, and on the strength of it had invited him to dinner.

And there would be, as usual, quite a small crowd there, and he would have to buy a new collar. He wished he had told the staff, who would have enjoyed

herself hugely in the men's department. She would probably have forgotten to buy the collar, anyway.

Ah! here she was now, coming up the stairs; pretty slowly to-day, by Jove!

What was she up to now, the minx! One would think by the way she lingered outside the waiting-room door that she was reading that once-elegant piece of cardboard which desired an inquiring world to come in and not to knock.

He whistled loudly a bar or two from the latest opera to let her know that he was still on earth, and that, though he had patience, there was no inexhaustible store of it. He supposed he'd better send her for that collar.

His tactics were immediately successful. There came a demure knock at the editorial department.

He did not turn. He hoped his back would be an epitome of sternness and decision.

His eyes twinkled, and one of them winked expressively at the motto on the wall. She was not sure of her reception, wasn't she? Well, she jolly well should not be!

He cleared his throat majestically, declaiming sternly:

"Well?"

A voice, decidedly scared, but very sweet, answered. It was totally unlike the voice of the minx, and it asked a question:

"Are you—please may I see the editor?"

The feet lifted themselves off the old brown desk with startling celerity. The ancient hat deposited itself hurriedly, if absent-mindedly, in the waste-paper basket. The editor rose and turned round in a second.

He found himself bowing to a Vision. There was no other word to describe it. He felt he must rub his eyes to see whether he had fallen asleep, like Rip Van Winkle, for either lavender-bushes were all abloom in his office or one of the picture-ladies from the jacket of the novel on the desk had come to life.

How else describe this lilac-gowned young thing who shone out of the dusty, shabby office?

But she spoke again, and her voice trembled more than ever :

"Please—may I see the editor?"

It was real, after all. It was alive, and the lilac frock was part of it and not of the novel-wrapper persuasion.

He had recovered himself and was bowing with the old-world courtesy that always distinguished him, with its air of placing himself and his office, ay, even the staff, unreservedly at her disposal.

"I am the editor, madam!" He coughed to cover the embarrassment which the memory of his uneditorial attitude on her arrival excited for a moment. "The staff is out, I regret to say. As a matter of fact, this is—er—one of those unexpected half-holidays. Aunt, or grandmother dead, or something or other like that. Staffs nowadays have as many relations as Abraham had. Pray sit down."

He had found her a seat, having managed, with his back to her and a magnificent obscuring wave of a hand that contained his handkerchief, to dust the chair. His last clean handkerchief! Ah, well, there was always Catherine!

"Pray be seated!" He placed the chair dexterously behind her, and she seated herself nervously on the very edge. She was evidently neither sure of herself, nor of him, nor of the all-too-apparently strange world in which she found herself. He looked solemnly at her with his twinkling, irresponsible blue eyes. What a pretty girl it was, to be sure! What did one do or say when shy, pink, golden-haired angels in lilac dresses floated unexpectedly into one's office? And, dear me, how very shabby and dusty the office was to-day!

Well, to conduct a successful conversation someone must make a beginning. He cleared his throat and miraculously thought of old Doctor Thingummebob—he never could remember his name. Well, it didn't matter! It was only Thingummebob's highly successful manner with ladies that he wanted. He hoped the beggar hadn't copyrighted it.

All these frivolities darted through his brain while

he gave that preparatory cough. Now he leaned forward, solemnly, finger-tips meeting, and began impressively :

“My dear young lady”—by Jove! that wasn’t a bad beginning, and it did sound like old Pills—“My dear young lady, if I can be of any use to you I am at your service. You want to see me—er—professionally, I take it——”

She looked a shade less frightened, and she spoke more clearly :

“Ay! I’m jist wantin’ somethin’ tae dae.”

Doctor Thingummebob vanished like magic.

“Good heavens, you’re a Scot,” he cried to her; “you’re a lowland Scot.” And he got up and strode towards her and shook hands with her heartily, and his still handsome face glowed, and his eyes that would never be old twinkled more than ever.

“You’re Scottish,” he repeated, and enthusiastically shook hands again. “Why, bless my soul! I haven’t heard an accent like that for years. And you are wanting a job, and someone sent you to me—someone who has followed my meteoric rise in the heavens of literature, but happened to look the other way in the hour of my descent. Now, who could have sent you to me?”

She was as red as a rose and a little pulse quivered in her throat.

“No one sent me. I—I just found my way here. I was looking for Findlay and Anderson’s place and someone directed me wrongly, or else I came into the wrong building.”

“You have.” And he nodded his head and laughed as he leaned back in his chair. He waved a comprehensive hand about the room. “Decidedly, my young friend, this is not the palatial establishment of Findlay and Anderson.”

He chuckled as if the comparison were a great joke. Then he leaned forward, and now he spoke in broad Scots :

“But you’re no sae far awa’, lassie.” And his eyes

twinkled at her more than ever. "I can speak the Scots, too, for a' it's mony years since Jock Gordon came to take London by storm."

She looked at him with interest. The fear that he was mad, quite mad, had gone. She even smiled.

"And did ye, Mister Gordon?" She spoke so eagerly that he fumbled in his mind for his last sentence. Did he what?

"Did ye storm London? Ye *did* succeed——"

He looked at her and at the old brown desk, companion of his wanderings, with its pile of novels to be reviewed, its litter of paper still untouched, around the dusty, shabby room, and then back at her, this eager-eyed, glorious young creature who had evidently also come south to storm London.

He spoke with mock solemnity, with a dramatic wave of his hand:

"Well, ye can see and judge for yoursel'."

But her eyes were not on the shabby carpet, or the untidy paper-littered grate (he must really give the charlady a talking to).

She was looking enviously at the piles of books. The glory of being in an editorial department—the letters on the door were big and commanding—almost overcame her. Her eyes sparkled and shone like stars.

"Oh!" And she drew a long breath. "And you have a newspaper, maybe, of your very own?"

"Ay." And he stifled a sigh. "It's my very ain, a' richt"—the other fellow had indeed dropped out long ago—"only it's a magazine instead of a newspaper. And it comes out once a month, or it used to. Maybe it will be turning itself into a quarterly, and then a halfly——"

She looked at him reproachfully. He was talking nonsense, was teasing her. Her cheeks grew hot and she wanted to leave. But there he was laughing and nodding his head again, and she could not run away from those kind, merry, twinkling eyes. And now he was confiding in her, leaning forward and speaking to her as if he had known her for years.

"Catherine," he said confidentially, "Catherine says that it would be quite the newest thing in journalism to make it an annual event——"

She regarded him with her deeply blue inquiring eyes. "But who is Catherine? Your daughter?"

"My daughter!" He threw back his head and roared at that, half-amazed that anyone striving to climb the rungs of the literary ladder had not heard of Catherine. "Why, everybody knows her. She's a graceless, tyrannical young friend of mine, of yours, of everybody's——"

She shook her head: "I have never heard of her in my life. I dinna think they have ever heard of her in Scotland."

"Ah! but they miss many of the guid things of life up there." He looked at her whimsically: "Well, ye are no long frae the North, that's evident."

"I came only yesterday."

"Yesterday? With your people? Are they going to live in London?"

These questions fired at her left her breathless but gave her time to compose an answer. She looked away from the frankly interested, inquiring eyes.

"I came by mysel'," and then in her direct fashion, "I ran awa' frae my hame."

There was a brief silence. He stared at her undecidedly, scratching his head at a loss for words. The lilac angel had "run away," had come to London only that morning, and was already on the warpath, looking for a job! He wanted to laugh, but as he stole a glance at the delicate profile he saw that it looked intensely miserable, that she gulped as if she found difficulty in swallowing. She looked as light and fragile as a leaf, something to be blown on the first wind of chance.

He spoke kindly: "Hae ye your fare hame, lassie?"

She turned on him in a sudden stormy passion that amazed him:

"I will never go back. Never, never——"

"And what'll you do, do you think in London,

lassie?" His voice was still kind. It was not surprised, it was understanding. "Do you ken anyone here?"

She shook her head. She could not honestly say that she knew Cecil Anderson, or that he would remember her.

"Then, my dear child, what on earth do you think you can do alone in London? Have you any friends? No? Any money?"

"I have some money," she said eagerly. "I have nearly two pounds ten shillings left."

Two pounds ten! He wanted to laugh more than ever. The poor child! Two pounds ten—fifty shillings—Oh——

"How old are you?"

"I am over twenty-one."

He had to yield to that merry inconsequent laugh. Twenty-one, perhaps nearly twenty-two. Great Scott, and about to storm London with two pounds ten! He tried to adjust his features. Really, the matter was grave. This bit of a lassie could not go wandering around London popping into strange offices.

His voice became anxious. "Where are you going to stay to-night? Have you fixed up anywhere while you hunt for work?"

She looked at him with a gleam of hope. So he would not be telling her that she had better bide at home. He must have thought it possible for her to get something to do or he would not speak like that.

"There was a lady in the train who told me of a place. She wrote it on a card——"

He turned his head quickly, rapped out his words sharply. "Yes. Where was it?"

She fumbled in her bag and brought out the slip of paper and handed it to him. "She said it was very respectable." She looked at him anxiously. "Is it?"

He nodded with due solemnity. "Most respectable; pillar of respectability in this dangerous city; just the place—the truly admirable institution, ye ken, not the city—for Wandering Visions."

She drew a sigh of relief. "I was no sure at first what the letters really meant. Down in—Paisley"—she had hesitated ever so slightly—"they say London is a terribly wicked place."

She was looking at him now, half apologising, half disbelieving, and then when she mentioned Paisley there came into her beautiful, limpid eyes a darkness as of bewilderment and positive pain, and over her face a strained, unhappy expression. She passed her hand slowly across those tragic beautiful eyes with an indescribably weary gesture. He spoke quickly, divining that she was suddenly troubled, almost overwhelmed by her thoughts:

"Well, tell me what you intend to do now you are in London."

She shook her head. "I don't care what I do"—then, hopefully, "I can write verse."

"You can, can you? Don't tell me you aspire to be a poet."

She said slowly, "I have written a book of poems."

"Worse and worse," he groaned. He waved his hand at her. "Ye mustn't do it. You mustn't do it."

"Why not?"

"The world's full of poets. London's crammed with them. Little poets, big poets, fat poets, thin poets, futurists and yesterdayists and all sorts of ists. Now don't tell me that a charming young lady like yourself has travelled all the way frae Scotland with another bundle of verse."

He wagged his head at her solemnly. "It is really too bad of you, my young—er—countrywoman."

She was a trifle scared. She spoke broadly in her excitement. "Dae ye really come frae Scotland?" She was poised ready for flight.

"I do, and I do not," he reassured her. "I had a Scottish grandmother. Indeed I wouldn't be quarrelling with a genealogist if he said a grandfather, too. Anyway, I did live there once, and that being so"—he bowed elaborately with his hand on his worn grey jacket—"I

am entitled to your confidence, and to put myself and *The Eaglet* at your service."

She had looked round the room, and he wondered whether she were considering just how long it would take to leap to the door, wrench it open, and bolt wildly down the stairs as one pursued. She might even cry at the outer door, as he had once heard a man from Glasgow cry:

"Polis! Polis!"

Perhaps, more charitable thought, she was looking for *The Eaglet*, thinking it a bird instead of a magazine. But she said to him: "Ye dinna think I can get anything to do, then?" and a little sadly, "I thought the book of poetry would make a beginning easy."

"My dear young lady"—he was Doctor Thingummebob again, impressive, fatherly, solemn—"if you mention poetry in any of the temples of literature in this benighted region you are lost. If you even whisper it, your friends will be as the Arabs who folded their tents and as silently stole away. You mustn't do it."

The eyes she turned on him were tragically troubled and appealing.

"Then what must I do?"

He pursed his lips. Then suddenly he saw light:

"Why, you can write piffle. Tripe! Yards of it!"

Piffle! Tripe! She stared at him harder than ever. Doubts of his sanity again assailed her.

He waved his hand as if the thing were concluded. "Easy as jumping off a log. There's a rage for it nowadays, the world gulps it by the column, and can hardly wait until next issue for another dose."

He nodded at her and leaned back in his chair. Her eyes, uncomprehending, still scared, followed him.

"That's all you have to do, write about restaurants and head waiters and dukes and lords and ladies and chorus girls. Anything you like, it doesn't matter whether it's true or not. No one worries about that."

"But I don't know anybody here."

"You don't have to know them. Your man is the *commissionaire d'hôtel*, or the head waiter, and your

point of view an adjacent table, or you might help to wear out the entrance-hall carpet."

Hurriedly he drew a sheet of paper towards him, seized a pencil, dashed a few lines on it, and handed it to her triumphantly :

"There we are! Free, gratis, and for nothing!"

She read it aloud in a trembling voice. She was perilously near tears, had he only known it.

"While dining at the Mall I saw Lord Tom Noodle, Miss Lizzie Indo-Screet, and Lady Maria Chatterbox. The Duchess of Tangohurst and Lord Gaiety-Chaser remarked to me in confidence——"

She lifted her head and swallowed a sob. There was no doubt the tears were not far off now.

"But—I don't know any of them!"

He gazed diplomatically at the motto over his desk. By Jove! this keep-on-keeping-on business had its drawbacks.

"You don't have to know them. It comes as easy as a judge's joke; only, with the latter, you have to find the joke, which is not so easy."

She was deeply distressed. Surreptitiously she wiped away a tear.

Then she sat up, all at once brave and calm. The change in her and her voice was remarkable. She seemed suddenly to realise she was talking to a complete stranger, and that she had taken up a great deal of his time.

"I'm afraid I could not do work like that." Her eyes turned gravely on him. "I do not think I want to do it. I shall just have to find something else."

He admired her a great deal in that moment, sensed the pride that came to her help, the battle she fought against tears.

He assented cheerfully. "You'll get plenty to do. Of course you will. I'd even give you a job on *The Eaglet* had we a vacancy on the staff."

His eyes danced back at her. He nodded his grey head in irresistible good humour.

"And the staff's not of much use, either, let me tell

you that. It chews stick-jaw, or gum, or some other vile concoction, and when it's not reading cheap novellettes, it stands in front of a mottled mirror and tries its hair this way and that." His eyes twinkled so irresistibly that an answering gleam flickered into hers.

"Yes," he said. "I guarantee that if you were to go out into the ante-room now you would see it—the staff, I mean, not the room—doing its hair after the latest fashion favoured by the leader of the chorus, or tying a huge new bow at various angles. And always the stick-jaw in evidence."

Then a bright idea struck him. He leaned forward impressively. "And the minx has got to go! I can see that now. Catherine always said that my good nature—she believes I am good-natured—approaches weakness. By Jove! I shall ring her up and see what she has to say to a change of personnel. No, stay there! Don't go!"

Was he mad? Ought she to open the door and run away? Someone downstairs would tell her where Findlay and Anderson's was. She had better get up now while he was telephoning and flee.

But his face—and it was a kind, reassuring face, after all, and apparently quite sane—was turned towards her as he held the receiver to his ears. His hand waved her back to her seat. He was speaking now:

"Halloa! Halloa! Oh, I say. Is that you, Catherine? Are you very busy? Oh, yes, I forgot, you always are busy. Well, I want to see you about"—here he discreetly lowered his voice—"about an immediate change of staff."

Clearly a laughing voice asked him what she had to do with it.

"Oh, come now, Catherine! You're adviser-in-chief to this concern, you know. And really, I'm in a devil—the very deuce of a pickle! Yes! There's a brilliant young journalist here. Well, she wants to be a journalist, is desirous of attaining something in the nature of a position."

Then he threw back his head and laughed. "No! Not an honorary position. We hold that. What do you think of it?"

There was a period while he listened to what she did think. She had evidently asked him what the prospective staff was like.

"Ah, well! She's sitting in the room here now. She doesn't know London at all—came from Scotland yesterday—ran away from home. You know, Catherine."

Catherine *did* know, and an animated conversation proceeded, punctuated at *The Eaglet* end by:

"Yes—yes!" "By Jove, yes!" "Just like you!" "Why, bless my soul, I never thought of that!"

Still holding the receiver to his ear he turned his face to his visitor:

"Catherine wants to know if you have had any lunch."

She did not know what to say. It seemed so strange to sit there and know that two people, complete strangers, were discussing her, already disposing of her. She shook her head, and he transmitted his translation into the telephone.

"No; she hasn't had a bite. Half starving, poor child! Right—all right!" He put the receiver back with an exuberant clang and faced her. He began to speak at a great rate:

"Now that's all settled! You're to come with me straight away to Catherine's flat. She said she went once on a tour of inspection to that place where you are staying; that it's the draughtiest, most villainously respectable place she was ever in; that the cubicles are not as wide as a horse-box; that the superintendent has a frosty face and suspiciously inquiring eyes; that the girls rush about and grab food from a sort of counter, and eat it from bare wooden tables; that the only private fire in the place is in the superintendent's room. In short, she said she wouldn't leave a dog there"—and he shook his head kindly at her and with an air of proprietary interest—"and certainly not a homeless little Skye terrier!"

He looked round the shabby room, picked up his bag, hunted for gloves and stick. He seemed to see the dust, to feel the air of stagnation and neglect. His eyes fell on the books on the table. He felt reflectively in his pockets. Then he threw care from his shoulders, and, stepping to the door, flung it open.

It was even as he said. The staff was doing its hair before the mirror. The reflection faced them, more goggle-eyed than ever because of the pink vision framed in the door of the inner room. The mouth suspended its revolutions, and became a perfect note of exclamation.

"Miss Dothy!" ordered the editorial department majestically.

Miss Dothy turned slowly from the mirror, still staring open-mouthed.

"A taxi at once!"

"Yes, sir!"

The voice of unexpected and thunderous command sent her scurrying down the stairs like a startled rabbit.

The editor chuckled as he heard her flying steps. "How Dothy, little busy bee," he punned, and then, "Bless my soul! I don't even know your name!"

"It is Eltrym—Hardie." The pause was barely perceptible.

He took off his hat and made her a sweeping bow. "And I am John Montgomery Gordon, fair lady."

A laugh escaped Eltrym. His irresponsible blue eyes, the cheerful grin with which he met good and bad fortune alike, the military air of command he had assumed with the flapper Miss Dothy, and its results, set her laughing.

Her heart fluttered with joyous expectation. Youth danced in the very blood of her veins, and the world was a new and wonderful place, glowing with possibilities.

They went down the dusty narrow stairs, and an office-boy peered after them.

And out on the pavement was Miss Dothy, skipping

forward with a newly acquired alacrity to hold open the door of the taxi, eyes still a-goggle.

Her employer turned to her majestically and repeated the usual lofty formula :

"Miss Dothy, if anyone calls, I expect to be back within an hour. However, I may be detained a little longer on business. Take all messages."

The door shut, and the taxi moved off and left Miss Dothy in her short skirt and plaits, her big bows and high boots, staring after them.

"Well, and did you *ever!*" said Miss Dothy.

CHAPTER XXV

CATHERINE GIVES A PARTY

*As a perfume doth remain
In the folds where it hath lain,
So the thought of you, remaining
Deeply folded in my brain,
Will not leave me. All things leave me,
You remain.*

ARTHUR SYMONS.

"OH, Peter dear," cried Catherine gaily in her high, sweet voice, "will you never grow up? You believe anything! They're only teasing you, really!"

She was looking across a great green bowl of yellow daffodils at Eltrym with the light in her eyes that Eltrym loved to see.

Catherine's wallflower brown eyes could be so quiet, so gay, so dark, like a willow-hidden pool, and then suddenly flashing light and brimming with laughter.

Dark-haired, delicately pretty, Catherine Richards was radiating sheer joy now, as she beamed on everybody in her tiny bachelor flat, perched high up among the attics of one of those red-brick blocks that gaze solemnly over the Thames by Chelsea Bridge. After years of valiant struggle as a journalist in London, Catherine had published her first book. She was giving a party to celebrate its coming out, and her heart sang like a bird over the long-deferred débutante of her dreams. She was poor, and the book would not make her much richer, but that did not matter. It had never mattered to generous-hearted, loving and lovable Catherine Richards.

She would go without substantial meals to give cups of tea to her friends, and to entertain the coterie of

budding Art and Literature she had gathered around her. She would give of her little ungrudgingly and without thought of recompense.

No one ever had guessed, no one ever would guess—if Catherine could help it—what a struggle it meant to keep the flat going at times, what long hours were robbed from the night for an article for one or other of the London newspapers that considered her work favourably.

The flat, among the attic windows, and humming now with youth and laughter and happy voices, was dainty and golden brown and restful, like Catherine herself.

When Eltrym first entered its hospitable doors, heard Catherine's voice and felt the pressure of that kind, friendly hand, she felt that all had been part of her existence, that here, for a time at least, she might let slip the pack of care that burdened her shoulders.

She understood now the affectionate note in the voice of the editor of *The Eaglet* when he had spoken of Catherine Richards as "everybody's mother."

Then she had pictured someone older, grey-haired and stern, perhaps wearing intimidating glasses, and, instead, there was a Catherine who would never grow old.

Her heart throbbed as she smiled back in adoration at Catherine, across the room. She had been so lonely, had felt so tired and frightened on that first day when she climbed those long flights of stairs to Catherine's flat, and now that she was so suddenly, joyously happy she was afraid.

Catherine had christened her Peter Pan from the very beginning. Eltrym had no idea how the name suited her, how childlike she looked with her fluffy hair and wide eyes and the soft brilliant colour of the glow of excitement in her cheeks, as she sat on a cushion on the floor. Lots of other young people sat there, too, for the chairs had long given out. Everybody who came to the flat had adopted her at once as one of themselves, in the free and easy camaraderie of their friendship.

"My dears," Catherine would say in her laughing voice, "she has written a book of verse, and it is actually going to be published, and she got a job the first day after she came to London. Now, what do you think of that, all ye scribes and pharisees?"

Everybody had been jolly and breathlessly interested over it as if they had known her for years.

All except one, perhaps, a heavy-faced, rather acid-looking girl with eyes like moons.

"You needn't take any notice of her, poor dear," someone had gaily confided to Eltrym. "She will be as jealous as anything about you. You see, she was years and years before she got a book of verse accepted. And you'd better keep in with her, my dear Peter Pan, for she writes reviews for one or two powerful papers."

Eltrym glanced at her. She wished she did not feel that Anna Cranborough disliked her and would do her harm if she could. Why should she feel like that? She looked up to find Anna's eyes on her and, by the sneering way the thin lips moved, she knew she was the subject of discussion.

There was a babel of voices, a renewed clatter of cups. Everybody talked at once. The room was full of cigarette-smoke, and faint feathering clouds of it drifted over the yellow glow of the daffodils.

On the window-sills were jars of dried rose leaves and last year's lavender, and now and again a whiff of their subtle lingering fragrance was wafted in.

As she perched on the cushion she felt so happy to be among them all, to be part of this tumultuous river of youth flowing towards the Sea of Dreams. All of them wrote books or verse or sang or painted, and they were full of their work, recounting the incidents of the day, or since they had last met. All were merrily extravagant in speech and gesture, bubbling over with sheer exuberance of spirit.

"Mon Jew!" said a shrill happy voice. "You should have seen Epstein's Venus. You don't know what you have missed."

A young, eager voice rose above the clamour of

discussion. "And then we went to the Café Royal on the proceeds. There was Augustus John, you know. I'd never seen him before and nearly fell into my coffee with excitement."

"My new charlady, my dears, is magnificent. She wears a huge cloak—a charlady's cloak covers a multitude of shins—and she uses such big words, and always in the wrong place, that I simply shriek every time she opens her mouth. And when I told her that I must give a little dinner soon, she said solemnly, 'Yes, mum, I know you must retaliate.'"

All had tiny flats or shared them together and shut themselves up into their boxes of rooms to work, and wrote late into the night and sometimes all day as well, for free-lance journalism has its demands as well as its hours of freedom. Not more than one or two could afford, after rent and light and firing and food bills had been paid, to join clubs.

Catherine's brown-and-gold flat had long since come to be accepted as a meeting-place and to take the place of a club. One went instinctively with news of joy, or grief, or some sudden bit of journalistic luck, or to be comforted because one had inexplicably lost one's job. Each had a wild riot of a three-course dinner when the bit of luck came, and sent invitations broadcast. There was scurrying along corridors and riotous borrowing of extra plates and cups and knives and forks, excited, happy voices in graphic explanation.

Someone else would dash in with an offer of candle-shades; all the flats in the building would hum like a hive; heads would poke out of doors, kimono-clad figures make a rapid dash across hallways; breathless voices would clamour, "Have you heard—Mattie's had her book accepted? Yes, really. Isn't it *beautiful* of them to take it? And the last we saw of Mattie her nose was stuck to a milliner's window! She will have two new hats out of the advance royalty."

Someone was talking of editors and publishers now in Catherine's flat; "... the new magazine, you know. Sadie Logue and I flew up the stairs, about

fifty-five flights more or less, probably less, and dashed into the room after being fearfully polite to the office-boy, and prepared ourselves to bow our stateliest to an old and gallant editor—and, my dears, there was Something Special in the editor's chair. It had a lisp, a monocle, yet it seemed as if it were just out of the cradle, and yet had such a blasé drawl—and told *us*, who have written stories for years, who could have dandled him on our knees while we looked for his first tooth, that he was afraid we would be too inexperienced for *his* magazine. It was 'somethin' crool, mum!'"

The girl addressed as Sadie giggled rapturously: "Yes; he said he wanted Blood for his magazine—and every second we expected the door would burst open and its mother appear with a feeding-bottle. We simply felt that we would like to tickle it playfully under the chin and say 'Didums' and 'Wee 'ickle thing' to it."

"But the publisher I struck," said another, "talked loftily of what his firm required, and all the time he talked he dropped his aitches with such rapidity that my head grew dizzy with mentally picking them up, poor things; and he told me, as he was about to bow me to the door, that what the public wanted nowadays was realism, not Art. 'Hart!' said he, 'we 'ave too much hart.' 'I see,' says I politely. And I stared sympathetically at his waistcoat buttons. 'Fatty degeneration, isn't it?'"

At this juncture there was a tap at the door, and a tall girl in blue thrust her head in and waved a frantic hand to Catherine.

"Hullo, Catherine and Everybody! Hullo, Sadie, old thing! I'll be in in a minute, as soon as I finish this short story. It's for an American magazine and I don't think I've got the langwidge quite right. Has anyone here ever been to America?"

A chorus of voices reached her. "Wal, stranger, I guess not. Where do you think we could get the almighty dollars in the one-horse village of London?" And they hurled things at her of this nature, supposedly American, until she fled.

All merry and mad and young and happy, in spite of struggles and wistfulness at times in eyes that peered and watched the pleasure-loving world go by, radiantly garbed and well fed; and they sighed desperately as they wrote of big dinners at the Ritz or Claridge's or the Piccadilly, and yet were all unwilling, even if it were possible, to change their Bohemian existence.

Some of the girls who sat in Catherine's rooms that day hailed even from as far as Australia and were eagerly seeking recognition in the Old World, raving over London at dusk when all the lights were lit and shining through a faint mist of rose and grey and palest heliotrope, even if they sighed at times in the winter for days of suns such as shone half the world away. And to understand Catherine Richards, who was little older, indeed younger, than some of them, you must realise that to all she was specially the friend and confidante to whom they instinctively turned. Even Anna Cranborough, with her bitter, jealous disposition, her prudishness partly born of her own too plump unattractiveness of form and feature, conceded that Catherine was a friend one might be proud of.

Anna was paragraphically running over in her mind the guests that counted. There was Sadie Logue, an Australian of witty tongue and teasing ways, who wrote such strong short stories that the public believed her to be a man; there was Una Moore, who had a marvelous voice and varying depths of tone for poem-recitals; there was Lalla Brooke, who had come to London one Tuesday with a bundle of manuscript under her arm and had astonished everybody by finding a publisher for it by Saturday. (Anna, who was less lucky, could never forgive her for that, or for the fact that publishers had gone on accepting her stuff ever since.) There was a famous woman lecturer, besides a dozen or so of journalists who informed the world that read evening newspapers how to cook, how to keep moths out of furs, and what was to be worn in the coming season. Anna's mind summed them all up rather bitterly and jealously. And, of course, there was that

stuck-up little Hardie girl from somewhere in the wilds of Scotland, who was actually said to have a book of verse in print. Anna shrugged her plump shoulders. She simply couldn't understand what Catherine and the others saw in her. That Lalla Brooke, of course, she would rave over anybody—— But, personally, Anna felt that she wouldn't be able to see anything in anything the Hardie person might write.

Catherine came by at that moment, gracious and serene. She smiled down at Anna.

"More tea, Annabella." Catherine always altered names to her liking. She sat down beside Anna. "Have you met my new protégée? At least, she's as much *The Eaglet's* as mine. Isn't he a dear whimsie old thing? I expect he will be here any moment."

Anna glowered. She did not care for John Gordon. Privately she considered him a trifle mad. She dismissed him from the conversation without more ado.

"What's the Hardie person going to do for a living?" she said. "She will find that the market's absolutely crowded."

"She's already got a job," said Catherine, gazing demurely at her slender ringless hands, her lashes dark, her cheeks softly flushed.

Anna snorted: "Yes, I've heard of it. How can she live on that? Seven shillings a week, isn't it?"

Catherine said politely, "Oh, no! I believe he has raised the salary to twenty-five shillings, which, you will admit, is a small fortune in our line if one has somebody to chum with."

Anna said, in her violent, biased way: "I didn't think, from what I heard, that *The Eaglet* was bringing in that amount from subscribers."

Catherine looked at her thoughtfully. "Times *are* bad with the dear generous old thing, Annabella dear. But he has means of his own, you know. Don't you like him, Anna? He is one of the whitest of men, and has a heart like a child. He helps everybody. One can't just help loving him."

"I certainly do not love him." Anna shrugged.

"I'm not even interested in him, or in her"—which was a confession that she was interested, and had taken one of her violent inexplicable dislikes to Eltrym Hardie as well as to John Montgomery Gordon. Anna's dislikes, indeed, might be divided into two compartments, the other women who succeeded and the publishers who refused to recognise genius in the shape of Miss Anna Cranborough. Catherine felt secretly sorry about this. Anna as a reviewer and paragraphist had a cutting, clever style and the entrée to several prominent papers of note in London. If Eltrym's book of verse came out and Anna were in this antagonistic mood, "The Field of Stars" would suffer a partial eclipse. But Catherine did not voice any of these thoughts. She knew by past argument and the experience of struggling years, as well as the extraordinary bitterness and jealousy of Anna Cranborough's nature, that argument would not mend matters.

She sighed at times over Anna. It was inevitable that Catherine, who always found an excuse, or valiantly took up the cause of the under-dog, or the helpless or the disliked, should be friends with Anna, no matter who else cordially detested her.

Indeed, Catherine had more than once to defend her attitude.

"That Scratch-Cat!" someone or other would say, with decided emphasis, of Anna. "Oh, she's clever and smart enough, I admit that. She's too smart. And she has a tongue like a newly stropped razor, and it cuts as deep. I don't know how you can stand her, Cathie." And Catherine's gentle voice always rushed into explanation:

"I suppose she just can't help it, dear. I don't think she means it, really. Perhaps if we knew her a little better, dear, don't you think——"

"Oh, but, Cathie, you must know that they are all alike in that family. They are all literary or artistic, and one of the daughters got a book published after many years. It wasn't a success even for a first book; and the mother tramped like an indignant cab-horse

into the publisher's office and bullied him right and left, so that he has never been quite the same man since. He has developed a nervous disease, a reflex action of the elbow and a darting gesture in the direction of an imaginary hat. They say he even contemplates building two doors to his editorial sanctum—so, in the words of the Bard, he will have his exit and his entrance."

Catherine would laugh. It was difficult not to see the flashing scenario conjured up by these tongue-pictures. They were extravagant, of course, but there was no doubt that Anna could and did at times misuse her position as a reviewer when she had any personal feeling or influence in the matter.

"What do you think of my angel-child?" Catherine said to Anna. Anna followed her glance critically.

"I think she looks got up for the part, with that absurdly fluffy hair. It's obvious it's dyed."

Catherine shook her head imperturbably: "No! It isn't; I'm sure of that. And it is naturally curly, too. It was really my idea that she should wear it more loosely. You have no idea what a quaint, pathetic little thing she looked when John M. Gordon brought her in to see me. I felt I wanted to put my arms about her and say, 'Baby dear, you must go to bed for a week at least and rest.'"

"And did you know anything about her except that that irresponsible Gordon man introduced her? She's been here for days. Haven't you asked her any questions about herself?"

Catherine turned her dark, wondering eyes on Anna. "Why should I, Anna dear? I like or dislike a person and that ends it."

Anna grunted: "Humph! Some of these days you'll be badly taken in——"

Catherine's eyes danced. "Do you mean she will run away with my apostle spoons, or old masters, or my antique furniture?"

It was an open secret that Catherine's furniture had been bought bit by bit in obscure and cheap second-hand shops. It had been part of the delight of earning

money by her pen that she had been able, scanty purse in hand, to burrow in old shops in cheap neighbourhoods, to rhapsodise over the goods when sent home, often to transform them, by the aid of white for brown paint, from melancholy, neglected-looking articles of doubtful beauty into something fresh and spick and span.

"We got such a bargain yesterday, Peter and I," she began enthusiastically. "We furnished that empty room, you know. You must get Peter to show it to you, and don't fail to notice the effects gained by the judicious investment of a few shillings."

"Who paid?" Anna asked, with an of-course-I-well-know expression.

Catherine hesitated: "Why, we bought it between us. Peter had fifty shillings—a fortune to invest—and I had my unexpected haul this week, as you know."

Anna did know, and also how small it was. From her own better financial position in life she scorned the contrivances Catherine found joy in even now in the room in which she sat. Anna full well knew that the charming chintz and quaintly frilled seat of lavender by the window was in reality, when one lifted the lid, a receptacle for all manner of articles, as was also the small box by the bronze fender, with a flower-patterned chintz cover and puffed top, though dignified by the name of "le Pouffe." If you knew the secret of it, you knew that at the unobtrusive back, where the chintz parted obligingly, was an open candle-box in which reposed Catherine's boots and shoes and polish and dusters. She knew that the "angel-child's" bedroom and sitting-room would be on the same lines, looking for all the world to the uninitiated as a sitting-room only, with its bedlike appurtenances stowed out of sight or effectively disguised. There would be a wealth of cool chintz-cretonne over which sprawled huge pink or yellow or blue roses, or there would be pink-eyed birds with red heads and long saffron-hued beaks and emerald-green tails disporting themselves on a black cotton background.

Anna rose and thought with relief and pride, that was sometimes not unmixed with envy, of her own substantial, imposing home at Hampstead, where one gathered the real people about one, where famous names had dined, and where her mother, that proud autocratic dame—Anna would have been immensely shocked had she known that in the realms of literature her mother was known as the Cab-Horse—entertained only people who were worth while.

Here it was different. These people for the most part had not "arrived." In Anna's opinion they never would arrive. Just listen to them, laughing and giggling together like a pack of school-children!

There was that Hardie girl, too, laughing joyously with them. Anna detested her on sight. In justice to the detested who loomed large on Miss Cranborough's horizon, it may be said that she always did detest any-one young and pretty and fascinating.

It was perhaps because Catherine in her heart was aware of this that she was so uniformly kind to Anna, no matter what her moods. Anna was so very plain.

As Anna rose to go a sharp rat-tat came to the outer door. They heard the "Red Hand of Ulster," as the Irish charwoman was designated, go along the passage to open it. Catherine's face went first pale and then red. She broke off abruptly on something she was saying. She had a tense air of expectation.

Anna shrugged her shoulders as the hearty, merry accents of Mr. John Gordon filled the room.

"God bless my soul! I'm afraid I'm a little late. Everybody here? Just came along to wish you luck, Catherine; think it's the fifth time this week—and I've brought someone you know with me. Yes, here he is, just back from the Far East."

They came into the room now, into the medley of laughing, chatting voices, and as Eltrym looked up she was at once conscious how brilliant and sparkling were Catherine's eyes, how the colour glowed on her cheeks. A very aura of sheer delight encircled her. She was talking vivaciously to a young man with sleek fair hair

whose back was towards the room. She looked so young and so pretty in that moment that Eltrym had no eyes for anyone else. Dear, dear Catherine, how happy she was!

And then there was the editor of *The Eaglet* beside her, the centre of the laughing group who were bent on talking to him all at once. The editor smiled and chuckled, as if he enjoyed it hugely, and then signalled to Eltrym:

"I've brought someone who knows you," and at that Anna turned her head quickly. "He tells me he believes you said your first poem to him."

Eltrym turned her head. Her eyes were startled and her heart leapt into her throat. The young man with Catherine had come across the room towards her.

She did not know why she began to tremble as he looked at her with laughing blue eyes, half surprised, half doubting, wholly admiring. Then suddenly his hand went out and grasped hers warmly.

"Why, if it isn't the little girl who makes songs," he said. "Don't you remember?"

He sat down beside her. "Do you believe in telepathy? For I found myself wondering about you, whether you had given up writing poetry, or what had become of you. Then I came back to find that we had actually got a book of yours in the press, and here you are, living with Cathie. Gordon has just told me all about it."

He looked at her and laughed: "Tell me, is it really you?"

The trill of happy laughter would have shocked Christina. It even elicited a comment from Miss Anna Cranborough.

"Really and truly me," said Eltrym.

It was only then she became aware that he still held her hand.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE STAFF ACTS ON ITS OWN

*The wind was full of dear desire
At morning-shine,
And the young day was all afire.*

GERALD GOULD.

FROM the offices of *The Eaglet* an unwonted sound of bustle and excitement reached the editor's ears, so that instinctively he stopped, his foot interrogatively on the first step of the short flight of stairs.

There could be no doubt about it. Someone was softly singing, and there was unmistakably the sound of a scrubbing-brush, or maybe a series of scrubbing-brushes being wielded, and, to judge by the noise, with some effect.

He doffed his hat and scratched his head thoughtfully. Was his watch right or wrong? Had he got up too soon through going to bed too late, or vice versa? And was this or was it not Wednesday? From the vigorous brooming and scrubbing going on within, it should be Saturday, when the stout, heart-palpitating charlady in a bead bonnet laboriously climbed these stairs with many loud and protesting pants to announce her coming.

He was not always there to hear, for he had found that the charlady, like most of her tribe, was apt to scorn the sanctuary of an editorial department and consider it as a bureau existing for the sole purpose of receiving communications about long-dead and gorgeously funeraled husbands.

Why was she here this morning—bother the woman!—brooming and scrubbing at this hour? It was out-

rageous—and then through the open orifice of the letter-box there floated again the singing or, rather, low joyous humming as of a bee in clover. It broke into song as he gently opened the waiting-room door :

“Cam’ ye by Athol, lad wi’ the philabeg?”——

John Gordon stood absolutely thunderstruck. Feebly he gazed around him.

Could this be the anteroom of *The Eaglet* office?

It was and it was not. The linoleum, that erstwhile deplorably dusty floor covering which had long lost its youth in the service of a previous occupant and had grown greyer and more haggard under the weekly attentions of Mrs. What’s-her-name—the linoleum stared up at him, so scrubbed and shining and new-looking that it reflected his boots.

Polished were the chairs. Clean and shining was the window, which hitherto, curtained with dust and ornamented with cobwebs of generations of spiders, had long gazed down at a narrow lane, or at similarly dirty windows across the way.

Polished, too, and with a new lease of life was the office table, now minus the elbows and the yellow novel-ette of Miss Dothy.

And in the other room, his editorial department, marked strictly private (he saw, too, that even this notice had not escaped the beneficent virtues of soap and water), a voice to the accompaniment of a scrubbing-brush was cheerfully demanding in singsong fashion, of some lad with a philabeg :

“Cam’ ye by Athol . . .
. . . or banks of the Garry?”

Scrub-scrub-scrub. Something had got into the wrong office.

“Oh, I have but ae son, my gallant young Donald;
But if I had ten they would follow Prince Cha-arlie.”

Rub-scrub.

He had tiptoed to the door and opened it. For an instant the back view of a brown linen overall and a neat pair of heels and soles was presented to him. The overalled one was kneeling on his floor and apparently groping for something. Its head was shrouded in a blue-checked duster. It made weird noises with a brush and mystic passes with a rag; and all the while it rumbled musically about what it would do if it had ten sons.

Then its head turned suddenly. A flushed, startled face surveyed him as if he were an apparition:

"Peter!"

She sat back on her heels and flourished the wet rag at him. She pointed to the unfinished room.

"You are ten minutes too soon," she accused. "You know you never come in before ten."

"But, good heavens, Peter, you mustn't do this! There's a charwoman to do the work. Not that she ever does it properly."

"I ken that." And she shook her head at him. "She's a shiftless body, that one. She's no coming here again, wasting your money like that. I gave her the sack."

He sat on the nearest chair and wiped his brow weakly. He wanted to laugh and he also wanted to be angry.

But how could one be angry with Peter who had performed such miracles? She had not only renovated the office furniture and fittings but she had done something which he had intended to do for the past twelve months—she had dismissed the incompetent lady in the bead bonnet.

"I told her what I thought of her," said Peter earnestly. "That one would never get a job within a hundred miles of Glasgow, and she's a wee bit free with her tongue. Weel, you'll no be bothered wi' her any more."

She started to rub-scrub, rub-scrub again.

"Peter," said her employer in alarm, "you mustn't. I beg of you—you can't do this sort of thing."

She surveyed him calmly.

"Why not? I'm nearly finished, anyway. If ye hadn't come in before your time——"

"But now I am in I can't let you do it. Why, it's unthinkable," he cried. "You are my—my sub-editor and my assistant. Why, you can be everything to *The Eaglet*, except a charwoman, Peter. I really can't have it."

She sighed. "I could have kept it so clean," she said wistfully. "Yon woman wasn't a bit of good for you and it's really not hard." And then she looked at him hopefully. "Onyway I must finish it now I've started. Ye ken that?" Yes, he could see that. All round her was a shining, spotless expanse except for the oasis in which she sat. The dusty, tarnished brasses of the fireplace shone until you could see your face in them.

Gone was the rust that had clung to the fender; gone the litter of torn paper that had adorned the grate. Peter had been doing astounding things with the emery paper and brass-polishing mixtures she had begged from Catherine. The desk was so neat, so shiny that John Gordon gazed at it in despair. On the shelves above were the books in tidy rows; not a speck of dust to be seen.

"If ye would go into the next room for a wee while," his new staff suggested.

He went. He stared at the unfamiliarly neat aspect it had taken on. The lighter furniture had been rearranged, the table pulled well into the centre, pens, ink and paper in significant positions, a chair or two placed for prospective visitors. On the table glowed cheerfully a vase of Catherine's yellow daffodils. He lit his pipe thoughtfully, his eyes twinkling.

Eltrym, minus the headgear of the duster and her overall, poked her head through the door a little later:

"I've finished. You may come in."

He came and saw and was conquered. He sat down in the revolving chair and looked about him while she watched him anxiously. "What do ye think of it?"

He cleared his throat, a little touched at her

solicitude, at all the work she had done. Why, she must have been there for hours. He had given her the key last Saturday afternoon at Catherine's party so that she could let herself in.

"I think it's—why, its just wonderful," he said. "I never thought there could be such a metamorphosis. And then"—shamefacedly, because she looked so fresh and dainty that morning in her white silk blouse and her neat-fitting dark skirt—"it must have been very dirty, Peter."

"It was all that and more. It took several buckets of water."

"D'ye mean to say that *you* tramped up and down for buckets of water?"

"It's only on the next landing," she said, "and, anyhow, I didn't!"

"Then who did?"

"The office-boy across the way," she laughed suddenly. "Ay, he was awfu' guid. He wanted to help with everything, but I had one peep in at his office and I told him he might well be better employed in cleaning it before coming to help me."

He threw back his head and roared. "Oh, Peter! you will be the death of me."

"Ah, but ye havena seen the carpet yet." She pointed to the hearthrug which, once dusty and grim as the long-neglected fireplace, had sprawled by the fender.

It was back in its proper place, but glowed like Joseph's coat of many colours.

"Good gracious! I never knew it was red before, red and blue."

She dimpled with delight. "Carpet soap!" she confided to him. "My! but it was awfu' dirty. I don't think I have seen worse. I used nearly all the cake on it. And it does want another rub or two."

She looked at him pleadingly. But he was adamant. "No, my young friend, I will not have you making a slave of yourself. You must remember that you are a rising poetess. You have the yeast of genius working in you!"

Her eyes twinkled at that and she laughed. She had learned to laugh even in the short time since she had wandered into this office. He heard her humming softly to herself as she went into the outer room, shutting the door of the editorial department gently behind her.

He leaned back in his chair and gazed out of a window so clean that privacy was no longer possible. Across the way he saw for the first time in the offices men bent over desks, or girls at typewriters. They were no longer figures as of a dream, moving behind a screen of dust.

Whether it was the exquisite cleanliness of the room, its neat order, its tidiness of books and papers, or whether it was the sun dancing on the opposite side, he did not know, but he had a strange sense of exhilaration. He looked at the mantelpiece where hitherto had reposed a discarded tobacco-jar, sundry pipes and a carafe of water.

Now the dark grey marble shelf had a pleasing bareness. A bowl of flowers—the bowl was the erstwhile tobacco-jar—and the clock, beautifully silver and shining as in the days of its youth, alone held the place of honour.

The carafe shone also with unaccustomed lustre. The glass beside it was the last word in inviting cleanliness. It made one thirsty to look at it.

He saw that his pipes were on the desk in front of him, half folded in a newspaper. He began instinctively to find a place for them and looked at the window-sill, now strangely empty and its paint so well scrubbed that he instantly decided it would not do. A smile hovered about his mouth. To live up to this room he must get a new suit, and what for no? Spring was in the air. Eventually he sorted out one of the drawers of the desk as a receptacle, and at that moment he heard steps on the stairs, a light tap at the outer door.

"Come in!" called Eltrym in her sweet, clear voice, so prim and businesslike, however, that the editor smiled and closed one eye for a second.

He could imagine how straight she would sit up in her chair, with that neat, imposing pile of paper before her. He had told her to employ the first day as she wished. Afterwards there would be for review some books that did not matter—he would like her fresh, unbiased opinion on them.

She tapped at the door and brought him in a package and a message that had been delivered.

"Well," he asked, "and how do we like our job?"

"Oh, I love it," she said enthusiastically. "I love handling the books and peeping into them while I wait." She turned her shining eyes on him apologetically. "There's nothing else to do the day. It's no very busy. When it is——"

"Ay," he agreed genially, "when it is, there's going to be an extremely busy person; I see that. Processions of people up and down the stairs, crowds of eagerly waiting admirers of *The Eaglet* seated on the chairs, clearing their throats impatiently."

She looked at him anxiously. "Will ye be so busy as that?"

His eyes twinkled. "I'm expecting to be busy, or I'm a bad judge. I'll not go so far, mind ye"—cautiously—"as to say all the publishers in London will wait on my doorstep personally wi' breathless demands for advertising space, but I'll no be surprised if one arrives this morning."

One did arrive at this juncture, and not alone. There was a tap at the outer door and the simultaneous turning of the handle. Catherine came in, carrying a bunch of vivid red tulips, and following her was Cecil Anderson.

"Oh, there you are!" she cried breathlessly. "I was afraid you might have gone out to lunch without us."

"Please explain this intrusion," said the editor sternly, in ostentatious wrath. "Are you not aware that this is one of the busiest hours of the day in a street sacred to high thoughts? At luncheon only business matters are discussed, only business propositions considered——"

"Pouf!" Catherine retorted, shaking the tulips in his face. "I know all about you and your business lunches. Heavens! have you a new charlady, or have you married money? Just look at these prosperous-looking offices, Cecil."

They all went out to luncheon together, the new staff so excited that it walked on air.

First they pinned a notice gaily on the door—"Back in ten minutes"—and Catherine's lips twitched humorously as she watched this procedure.

On the way down, however, she spoke to Cecil Anderson in a low voice:

"Cecil, you said some time ago that you thought something might be done with *The Eaglet*, that you thought it was worth while putting money into it."

He nodded, and she went on rapidly: "Well, I think things are worse than we know. You see, since you left, one of the partners—the one with most money, of course—dropped out. And another was not too honest, from what I can gather. Anyhow, there was a breeze, and he is gone. But *The Eaglet's* a sad and moulting bird at present. It's losing all its poor feathers."

He was looking thoughtfully ahead at the two figures going down the dingy narrow staircase, John Gordon talking vivaciously, joking and gay as ever.

"He's mighty proud, Cathie. He'd resent any advice or interference, and you must remember that at first he would not take advertisements at all. You can't run a magazine on air. Then he antagonised a certain powerful newspaper-owner by turning down an application for a number of shares."

She said eagerly: "He did not want *The Eaglet* to be tied or committed to a certain policy, or exploited. He wanted it to soar free of anything likely to fetter it, to keep true to the principles with which he began it. He is not a temperance fanatic, as you know, but he would not accept a certain whisky advertisement."

"There are whiskies and whiskies," said Cecil. "I don't blame him for that, when he is running a magazine that is desirous of inculcating the higher thought."

But there's a limit to everything. *The Eaglet* went well at first because it was unusual. It is still unusual; but the people who raved over it at first are now raving over something futuristic, or impressionistic, or to-morrowistic. Such a magazine as *The Eaglet* can only appeal to a small section of the community, anyway."

"Don't tell me," said Catherine hotly, "as the editor of a newspaper did the other day, that the number of people who really want intellectual fare is nowadays practically non-existent; or, as Sadie Logue's publisher told her, that what is wanted is sentiment which is treacle, heaps of it——"

Cecil laughed cheerily: "Of course it is. It always has been. Think what newspapers have the greatest number of readers; think of the books that are most popular; think of the thousands of people who read serials and gape over picture-papers and fall to some blatant poster on the hoardings—thousands, to one who will pore over *The Eaglet*."

"But you believe in *The Eaglet*, don't you, Cecil?"

"Of course I do. And I intend humbly to go round one day during the week and have a little chat in the editorial department."

Then he gave her arm an affectionate squeeze. He really was very fond of Catherine. "And I'm grateful to it because I first met one of my best chums there. Do you remember you came with an article? By Jove! that's years ago, six years ago. We are growing old, Catherine."

"You will never grow old, Cecil." She flashed him a quick glance. Her cheeks had a deep glow in them. "You have that quality of growing up that J. M. G. and Peter have. She will always be like that, don't you think, Cecil?"

His eyes had gone more than once to the figure that waited for them by the kerb of the Highway of Letters with the sunny-hearted man. He forgot Catherine's question.

His glance lingered. It was curious that, for one

breathless moment, he saw only her eager face and the yellow hair blowing in curls about her eyes, that he seemed to go into the street directly to her, and that no one else counted even then.

"Shall we take a taxi," Gordon was saying, "or walk? It's a glorious morning."

"Oh, let us walk," said Eltrym. "I want to see the World."

CHAPTER XXVII

INSISTENT MEMORIES

*You and I must have met
In a star-world long ago.*

MARY FULLERTON.

THEY had lunch that day in an hotel of Catherine's choice. "I love its free and easy atmosphere," she said; "those rush chairs and tables scattered about and the lavish carelessness of the flowers, and the colours in the domes. And I love best the way everybody minds their own business, and a superior section of it doesn't lift its lorgnette to peer curiously at the kind of creature that has drifted in on the stream of humanity. And one isn't pestered by glad-eyed young women and doll-like lethargic young men dancing in and around tables." She might also have added that she had due regard for everyone's pockets, for Catherine was a thoughtful young woman in these things. She would spend extravagantly of her own, spend it while it lasted in joyous prodigality, and she sensed this also in Eltrym Hardie. It was just what she would surely do when from "The Field of Stars" there should fall a shower of gold or silver—most probably the latter.

Catherine guessed uncannily almost to a penny just what John Gordon possessed. She knew also that Cecil Anderson's father had arranged matters in his will so that, for some years ahead, his son drew only an assured and not over-large salary and a certain share of the profits.

It had been willed so, partly because Anderson senior had desired that his son should work and take a personal interest in the solid firm of Findlay and An-

derson, and partly because he had desired, above all else, to break off an early attachment which his son had formed and which the father had not approved of. He was a shrewd Londoner with a keen sense of values in business and in humanity. He had effectively "sized up," to use his own words, the ambitions of the girl with whom Cecil had fancied himself in love.

Catherine had, the night before, spoken reminiscently of the affair, in that delightful hour of intimacy when women don dressing-gowns and take down their hair and brush and plait it, and in appearance and chatter come back to the candour and irresponsibility of school-girlhood.

"Her name was Leila Something," said Catherine, and she made an unnecessarily vicious downward sweep of the hairbrush, as if it were a primeval stone-axe coming down on the head of an adversary. "And she was all swank, and oh's and ah's, and green-grey eyes fixed for ever on the main chance. She was a lady whose ambitions were tabloided into £ s. d. Cecil was apparently the wealthiest thing hopping about on the matrimonial horizon."

And perhaps it was because Catherine's rather pretty mouth was acting temporarily as a resting-place for three hairpins that her usually gentle voice sounded as if she hissed some of the words through her teeth.

"You know, Angel-child, how we women can hate another woman on sight and, to the male mind, apparently without reason. They see a pretty face that bowls them over—excuse slang, Peter: I always get slangy at this time o' night—and they never think whether there's a brain behind those fascinating eyebrows."

Then she broke off and laughed.

"I sound to myself like Marie Corelli, don't I?"

"I wonder," said Eltrym abstractedly, perched on the bed and looking more like a little girl than ever, "whether it was she I saw in the shepherd's hut at Hell's Glen?"

Catherine looked round in amaze. "Who? Marie

Corelli? Hell's Glen? Surely not? You make me feel as breathless at the mere suggestion as did Dean Inge on why Paul made the ladies cover their heads in church. Both seem as unfeasible, Angel-child. Fleet Street may be prejudiced and the Press a Mighty Monster, with capital m's, to crush out Genius, also with a capital letter, but you won't get it to publish that in your future reminiscences of the mighty. No, Peter!"

"I meant Leila," Eltrym assured her. "I am sure it was she. And I hated her on sight. It was the day I first met Mr. Anderson."

Catherine swung round very interested. "Do tell me, Peter. What did she say? What did she look like? Did she seem fond of him?"

Eltrym, otherwise Peter, gurgled. "To the best of my memory, she clamoured for her dinnah, and blamed him for the rain and was annoyed because he talked to me." She hesitated. She did not say she had seen them going over the hill together, his arm about that scarlet-coated shoulder, or the picture they had made against the sunset.

She added slowly, leaning forward, elbow on knee, her chin resting on the palm of her hand, "I do not think I looked at her very much. But I always remembered him, somehow. I remember that I, a small bare-footed child in a ragged plaid shawl, thought him wonderful."

Catherine bent down and kissed her impetuously. She was touched by that one reference Eltrym had made to the past, her candour about the voluntary admission of poverty; and her heart was moved also in a way that Eltrym then did not understand. "He always was, always will be wonderful, Angel-child," she said in a brisk, businesslike way she employed to hide emotion.

"Do you think," said Eltrym, "that he has forgotten?"

"Quite," Catherine answered decisively. "She married someone else, of course, when she realised what Cecil's income would be and the number of years that

must pass before the business would be Cecil's own. The old man—I always liked him—looked far enough ahead to see that happen. And if you want to know whether Cecil has forgotten, just think of his face when he was here to-day. Why, I haven't seen him looking so happy as that for years. There's nothing like a trip to Japan to chase the cobwebs away. It gives one a new lease of life."

And then she laughed happily and kissed Eltrym again ere she went to her room. Eltrym heard her singing softly to herself as she went along the corridor, singing like a young girl who sees all the buds of her dreams opening; and, lying in her bed, Eltrym sleepily thought of Catherine's singing, and thought also of when and where she had last heard that song.

Sandy had sung it, Sandy with his dark curly head thrown back, Sandy, conscious and proud of his voice, Sandy—oh, why did she think about it at all? Had she not made up her mind not to think, never—never to remember?

It was all over and done with. She had shut the door on the past. She had burned her boats. She drew the sheet over her head and declared desperately she would not remember. But it was dawn before she slept.

And now it was morning with the sun shining down on the Street of Ink, and she herself was an actual if obscure member of one of the hives of literature in those grey buildings that line each side of the way, not to mention the narrow alleys and courtyards behind that hum with activity.

They had all walked down to the Embankment, because she had not yet seen the Houses of Westminster, or Cleopatra's Needle, or the Bridge of Sighs. And there these wonders were, bits of London of incomparable beauty—the fretted towers of Westminster against the blue, and Big Ben booming out the hour; the sun scintillating on the tall plinth of the column where the sphinxes crouch by the Thames flowing on majestic and severe; the White Tower and its companions of unique interest. Gulls were wheeling out over the water,

and by the green tubs that waved in the quiet squares; pigeons fed and fluttered, too, in the Yard where the golden cross of St. Paul's glittered in the sun.

The men viewed the scene with the wordless affection of the Londoner. There was a pause as they stood, seeing it again through the eyes of youth perhaps, or with that clearer, prouder vision which the Great War—which was still in its very infancy—was to give us.

St. Paul's cross shone in the sunshine, but in the hallowed dusk of the interior there gleamed, seamed and torn and stained, battle flags which would be hoarded memories for future generations. One flag moved her strangely because of words that had been softly spoken in the shadowy silence: "The Scots took it that day, do you remember, when the pipers played until there was but one of them left?" A sudden desperate longing had swept over Eltrym—the scent of the gorse and the purple heather, the great mountains and the boulder-strewn slopes, the loch with its soundless tides. The flag with its drooping folds spoke of these things and more; it spoke of duty sternly and courageously done, of love and sacrifice.

To one, at least, it brought back memories haunting and haunted. During lunch Eltrym was very quiet, but the other three folk chatted gaily on, perhaps the more so because they felt instinctively that something had disturbed her. Catherine was full of laughing, gentle raillery at everything and everybody.

Afterwards they had coffee under a palm-tree. They had this end of the room almost to themselves, for they had been late for lunch, had indeed stayed long enough in the dining-room to see the stately gentlemen in black frock-coats, who haughtily surveyed that *appartement de luxe*, becoming just human hungry beings like everybody else and seating themselves at a table. As they went out they discovered their waiter hastily bestowing something that looked like a succulent chop into his interior. He bowed wordlessly as he brought the bill.

In the hall they gaily discussed the possibility of the

Premier and the Gold-Stick-in-Waiting solemnly staring at that "Back in ten minutes" notice on the office door of *The Eaglet*. Perhaps by now, Catherine suggested, a special edition of the evening papers was on the streets with excited newsboys darting under 'buses and cannoning into respectable elderly gentlemen with important-looking waistcoats, while they yelled the mystery, "Editor of *The Eaglet* missing."

Cecil, indeed, had looked at his watch more than once. For him business was an actuality and he would shortly have to go. If he stayed longer he would have to take a taxi-cab.

He did stay, strangely enough, to the very last minute, but how much Catherine with her wit and delicate, vivacious face, or Eltrym Hardie with her wistful red mouth and shadowy eyes, had to do with this unusual circumstance, is a matter of conjecture.

He seemed to laugh and talk most with Catherine, but now and again his eyes wandered across the wicker table with its bowl of pink currant-blossoms. He wondered of what Eltrym was thinking as she sat there. It stirred him in a curious way, and with a surprising depth of tenderness, that she should be so far away in thought from the laughter and gay jokes and the repartee which Gordon and Catherine were bandying to and fro.

Peter! Little Peter Pan, of what was she thinking that for the moment she seemed aloof from them all—for though her lips smiled stiffly her eyes wandered? Like Catherine she had taken off coat and hat. The sun shone on the glass dome and set its golds and blues and pinks and silver flashing and quivering. Her white silk blouse was open at the neck and the column of her throat rose white and tender. Against the glowing coloured glass she was like a wistful yellow-haloed saint.

Cecil leaned over and spoke in a low eager voice :

"Are thoughts for sale?"

She turned with a start; her eyes, very blue, met his. They found themselves staring at each other, the others forgotten.

She spoke first, a little breathlessly : "It is all so wonderful," she said unsteadily; "and I was looking, too, at that great bowl of wistaria over there against the window and wondering whether it were real. Catherine has a picture of the prettiest country cottage. Of course, it is too soon for wistaria, but this pink blossom is real, isn't it?"

She bent her face over, drew a deep breath of its sweetness. "I would love to see it growing," she said, and she lifted her eyes to find his still on her face. Her voice faltered suddenly. He put out one hand and touched the blossom where her face had rested. Something had wakened to life in him, subtle and fragrant like the bell-like blossoms of the rose Du Barri. He had not felt like that for years. He thought his heart could never again beat so quickly as long as he lived.

He bent forward eagerly. "Yes, it is real. And you shall see the country cottage if you wish. I know the picture you mean, the one in Catherine's sitting-room."

"What have I done now?" said Catherine, turning her head. "I can hear my name in excited accents." She smiled on them. "Bless you, my children! You seem to be getting on famously."

"We are," said Cecil; and at the eagerness in his voice Gordon looked at him quickly. "Cathie, do you remember the time we motored into Buckinghamshire and had tea at the inn in old Kimble, near Chequers Court?"

"Course I do," said Catherine with enthusiasm. "The very thought of it makes me reach for my hat and coat—thank you, Gordy dear—— Yes, and the car went wrong in its inside, convulsions or such like. Cecil crawled under it and muttered oaths into its petrol tank while I sat on the road and stared an inquisitive cow out of countenance."

"Well," said Cecil no less gaily, "I'm going to take Miss Hardie for a run there one of these days. I'm going to show her that very cottage where we had tea."

"I remember." She was drawing on her gloves and now she frowned because the button was hard to fasten. She thrust her hand, palm outwards, a little petulantly : "Button it for me, please, Gordy dear."

"We'll go some day soon," said Cecil exultantly, "and get there early, say twelve. That will give us a chance of seeing a few things and also it will bring us down in nice time for lunch."

Catherine's glove was now buttoned to her satisfaction, and she was engaged in gathering various impedimenta together, her handbag, the white fox fur, and some books to review for *The Eaglet*.

"Can't you stop longer now, Cecil?"

"No; rotten luck! I've promised to be back at a club affair. Some fellow going to be married"—he smiled across at Eltrym—"having a final celebration before signing the death warrant."

"How cheerful!" Catherine bent to inhale the perfume from the bowl between them.

Cecil was busily helping Eltrym on with her coat, brushing off an obsequious waiter in the background. Eltrym never knew what a queer gush of tenderness the threadbare collar, the cheap material of that coat, caused him. A feeling gripped him like hands about his heart and set all his pulses tingling.

He went out walking beside Catherine, who desired his opinion on the merits of Eucken and Bergson. Did he think this? Or did he think that? Could one expect the B.P. to take to a book on that subject?

Although a publisher and a business man as well as a friend, he found himself giving advice which sounded quite sane and collected. It gave no hint of the effort it cost him to turn occasionally to say to someone who knew nothing about it at all:

"Now, what is your opinion, Miss Hardie?"

They all stood for a moment on the pavement outside, all going separate ways. Even the editor of *The Eaglet* had an opportune appointment, after he hailed a 'bus for his staff, which was as yet very hazy as to its whereabouts and undeveloped in its bump of location.

Catherine had three offices to visit, three articles to leave. She was setting them in order so as to be sure they did not go to the wrong addresses. The first office was only a few doors away, so Cecil got into the taxi he had summoned. Before it started, he put his head out of the open window :

"I say, Cathie! Can I come to tea after five? You'll be home then?"

"Of course you can." Her face lit up. "Yes, do!"

Only herself and Gordon were left. She wondered why he looked sadly at her face, with that soft dancing light in the wallflower brown eyes. Perhaps business affairs were worse than she was aware of? She turned to him impulsively: "Of course you will come, too! I shall expect you."

"If I may, my dear." Then he raised his hat with his air of old-world courtesy and was gone.

He went on his way more slowly than was his wont among the bustling crowd that thronged Fleet Street. He shook his head more than once, for he was thinking of the soft light that had played in Catherine's dear, kind eyes when young Anderson leaned out of the taxi.

Dear, kind eyes of Catherine, but so blind!

His own felt suddenly weary with over-seeing, his heart heavy with the prescience of suffering that must come to Catherine. And it was coming soon! To him knowledge had already come when he lifted his eyes and saw Anderson lean across the table and touch unconsciously the pink blossom on the coffee-table, and heard him speak.

He sighed: "Youth—and the call of youth!"

And all at once he felt old. His buoyant spirit failed him and he walked, as it were, on crutches. He wished with all his heart that he did not believe that Catherine, dear, kind, patient, tender-hearted Catherine, had loved Cecil Anderson for years. He wished she had not looked so radiant-eyed when Anderson had thrust his boyish face out of that wretched taxi window; and I think that at that moment he wished his staff had stayed in the wilds of Hell-what's-its-name in Scotland.

Then he felt suddenly remorseful and tender about that. There was something pathetically wrong there, too. There was laughter, to be sure, but there were also long silences, as there had been to-day, when her eyes were like those of some hurt or hunted animal.

He did wish that eyes did not worry him so in this absurd way. That day one of his especial engagements had been to see a great drama that was being enacted in a picture-house in the Strand, and he had walked past it for the third time!

He retraced his steps once more, and then that part of him which would never be old beat rapturously.

He cast a swift glance up and down the street and plunged past the commissioner and to the box-office, over which hung the gaudy picture of "A Story of the Wild West."

Cowboys, galloping horses, sheepskin trousers and prairies galore! And all for sevenpence!

The red plush curtains fell to behind him and shut out this worrying, too old and all too serious world!

CHAPTER XXVIII

CAVE CANEM !

*Laugh, and the world laughs with you,
Weep, and you weep alone !*

E. W. WILCOX.

"WELL, Uncle John, and were you in time for your appointment?"

Catherine herself had opened the door, and her eyes were twinkling at him with the air of no illusions on the subject.

"Come in, do. How's dear *Aunt?*" she said very loudly. She smiled and closed one eye adorably, and then shut the door behind him. She leaned against it smiling, as he hung up the coat he carried and his hat. "I hope you notice my demonstrations of family affection are loud and calculated to reach to the floor below where two maiden ladies have doubts as to my innocence. They think it shocking that a single body in a flat should have men callers. All this via the charlady, who at times has feelings under her cloak as well as a gin-bottle." She rattled on, laughing at him: "And when Cecil arrived he was greeted as a long-lost brother, and Sadie Logue—who can act like Gertie Millar and Mrs. Pat Campbell rolled into one and pressed flat—insisted on falling on his neck and weeping copiously outside their door because he so suddenly reminded her of her 'diseased cousin.' I'm sure I heard buttons flop in sympathy from these decorous, early Victorian bodies."

She was still laughing and the bells on her bangle jingled, but suddenly all the cowboys who had cheered him leaped out of his mind and over the horizon, and

he had something of the sensation he experienced that afternoon, when he saw the heroine tied to a tree and the Indians doing the last dance round her as they fired the sticks, with never a cowboy in sight, for one knew that just at that identical second they had left the ranch or whatever it was, and there was ten miles to cover.

All very absurd no doubt and much mixed, and he took a long while to hang up his coat and when he did that to hunt for his handkerchief.

He mopped his brow carefully : "Hot work climbing these stairs, Cathie." How he wished she would not stand like that deuced what's-her-name girl on the film, her hands pressed tragically against the door behind her, her eyes laughing and all the while knowing ! But did Catherine know ?

"Cecil's here, then ? " he inquired casually.

"Yes ! We're all in Peter's room, because mine is in the spasms of spring cleaning, and the curtains are down and the carpets up, and Mrs. McFadyen considers beer the best thing in the world for cleaning paint. Oh, and I've got some truly startling news for you ! Now, you've already done your brow beautifully and you're going all over it again. And you seemed to have wiped all the colour out of your cheeks. You don't mean to say that my new Uncle rouges. Exeunt more buttons from spinster frocks——"

He took her hand gently, blinked as if too much light were in his old eyes. "What is the news, my dear ?"

Still she laughed down at him, taller than he in the high-heeled shoes she had donned and a new dress of white voile. Catherine always looked her best in white and knew it. It was her one concession to vanity, that and the big pink rose she had tucked into her belt.

"The news ! Why, you look as if you expected a catastrophe, and perhaps it is." She put her finger on her lip solemnly. "The staff has bought a dog !"

"A dog !" he said feebly. An immense wave of relief swept over him. How absurd of him to think

mad things such as that young Anderson had already run off with the staff!

"Yes! A real live specimen, the latest effect in tortoiseshell. He is already christened Joseph, but his coat of many colours will blend as he grows older, Cecil says. Come in and see him. He is the observed of all observers."

He was rather glad of that, anyway.

"And," said Catherine, walking leisurely beside him down the corridor, "he's got a pedigree, like his tail, from here to Fleet Street, or thereabouts. Indeed, I think it's three pedigrees, like his coat, blended in one, with an impressionistic effect."

"He sounds like a mongrel."

She laughed at him softly over her shoulder as they came near the door. "Not a word—he cost five bob. That fifty shillings is nearly blewed, I tell you. Thank goodness it's near pay day, when we'll pawn one of *The Eaglet's* feathers for wages and expenses! And not a word about that there tail of the dog. Cecil ventured and she was nearly in tears. She said the dealer—he was a strange dealer on the Embankment with a string tied to his only stock-in-trade and pensively watching the river, you see——"

"Yes, I see." And he laughed. "And she went up of course, and asked him was he selling dogs. And he nearly fell on her neck. I can see the picture, and the eyes of the dog which, of course, would know all about it, poor little brute!"

They laughed in silent merriment for a moment.

"The pseudo dog-dealer told her that that length was the latest fashion in tails, that they were worn like that in the very best circles."

The door was open, and Eltrym's room shone in freshness of white paint and a new cretonne over which sprawled huge roses in pink. Loose covers of the same attractive material decorated the easy chair and the couch, the identity of which was further disguised by big pink cushions of washing linen.

Someone, it was not difficult for John Montgomery

Gordon to guess whom, had brought a pot of pink heath in a rose Du Barri bowl, and the white painted writing-table on which it stood had an air of resemblance to a former cedar toilet-table. Such a base suspicion that the table, ere it reached a second-hand shop, had served this purpose was dispelled by a display of manuscript paper, several pens, and a fat, podgy bottle of ink.

Spring was blowing in at the window, stirring the curtains softly, bringing in the fragrance of growing, budding leaf and newly stirred earth from the gardens by the Thames; and spring was also present in the shape of three young people ecstatically kneeling on the floor and watching the antics of puppydom.

It was the fattest, furriest and most variegated-looking puppy in the world, a round playful creature, joyously tumbling over as it tried to walk sedately.

Sadie Logue had purloined the huge pink ribbon from the pot of heath and had tied it in an impudent bow, almost as large as the animal itself, over the puppy's ear.

Now the creature lay on its back, one paw waving frantically in the air, its tail wagging in a frenzy of happiness. One eye with a glimpse of white beamed on the world. Eltrym had caught him up suddenly and held him tight against her pink ruffled frock as they came in.

"Oh, Mr. Gordon," she cried, "I've got a dog. Come and see it."

"Do!" said Sadie Logue, sitting up on her heels and tweaking its ear. "Come and be introduced. Its name is Joseph. Joseph, sit up and be introduced! Put out your paw; no, not your tongue. Such things are not done in respectable society. Bow to your new master."

Gordon groaned, but he bent down and patted the puppy's head. "You don't mean to say it is to be admitted to a position on the staff?"

Sadie nodded at him brightly. "My guid man," she said with a *moue* at Eltrym, "ye dinna ken what an

asset ye will hae tae your establishment. Joseph is of guaranteed pedigree, he can date back right to the dog that bit Adam in the garden of Eden. All you have to do is to entertain him like this for an hour every morning and afternoon, and take him out on a chain to lunch with you. You will be the envy of Fleet Street, and crowds will follow you where'er ye walk."

"Oh, *I'm* going to take him out and look after him," Eltrym said hurriedly. "He won't be a nuisance."

"And he will be so useful," declared Catherine mirthfully, "in case of burglars."

"And bailiffs," said Mr. John Montgomery Gordon, fanning his brow less gloomily.

"Of course," said Sadie. "That settles the matter. Joseph will like anything and everything. His dietary for the morning has been the zealous chewing of the heel of one of my best shoes, the sole of Cecil's boot, and a yard or so of the new rug. In a week his teeth will be so developed that he can be guaranteed to bite a dun in unexpected places and in the approved stage manner, fashionable in the good old days, keep a dragon at bay."

Joseph, tired of tumbling on the floor, was trying clumsily to climb the newcomer's knee. Gordon held him off and considered him sternly and judicially:

"He's a mongrel."

"Oh," said Eltrym reproachfully, "how can you say that? The man told me all about his pedigree. He was a very nice man; though his face and hands were dirty, he had a kind heart. He said his wife would break her heart over his parting with the dog at all, but times were bad. So I gave him another shilling——"

Cecil threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"You didn't wait, I suppose," inquired Mr. Gordon carefully, "to hear how his seven children took it."

She gazed at him in amazement. "Why, how did you know he had seven children?"

"And his wife was a hopeless invalid," said Sadie, looking solemnly at the ceiling.

"And one of his children," added Cecil, "was in hospital and about to be seriously operated on."

"And seein' as 'ow, lidy," said Sadie sorrowfully, "wiv me pore wife 'art-broken, so to speak, an' me pore child in the horsepittle, and wot wiv me poppin' of the pore dog's chine an' tyin' him wiv string, wot was likely to 'urt 'is feelin's—a dawg's got feelin's sime as me and you, lidy—I was a-standin' 'ere a-lookin' at the sunset, wot was a long time going down, lidy, if ye catch my meanin', an' P.C. 16 keepin' of 'is eye on me—them police is suspicious fellows——"

Sadie's imitation was so realistic that Catherine was wiping the mirthful tears from her cheeks, and Cecil and John Montgomery Gordon were convulsed with laughter.

Eltrym stared at them all, holding the dog very tight. Its pink tongue licked her hands reassuringly. He was real, anyhow. She said: "Oh, you don't think he was going to drown it, do ye?" She looked aghast at their faces, and hugged the dog very, very tightly, her eyes pitiful with contemplation of what might have been its fate had she not arrived. Then she remembered that, soft and warm and alive, it was *hers*, and that it had crept right into her ever-lonely heart.

She bent down and rubbed her sunny head against its black-and-tan one. "Anyhow, it's my puppy. He can't take it back. He *sold* me the pup——" And she looked at the editor of *The Eaglet* for reassurance.

"Ah"—and he seemed to get a great deal of joy out of the mere contemplation of the fact—"as they say in political circles, he sold you a pup all right!"

CHAPTER XXIX

SADIE'S NIGHT OUT

*It was the time of roses :
We plucked them as we passed.*

TEA in the little room with its pink-and-white chintz, its pot of pink heath, its youth and laughter, while the last of the sun lingered on Catherine's tray with its garnered bits of old silver, battered, but shining bravely ! And then the sunshine, that early spring sunshine that comes so late and goes so soon, died from over the gardens and the river.

It was an hour which all who were there that day would remember—the laughter and chatter of happy voices, the puppy gambolling round joyously, begging for pieces and soon so full of biscuits and milk that it fell asleep, a ludicrous pink bow, on the hearthrug.

And Sadie, little Sadie Logue, who was so soon to die, though they did not know it, laughed and teased and talked as one possessed. They were all *fey* that day.

When tea was over they sat and smoked in the half-light, but it faded so swiftly. There came a quiet space, and suddenly Sadie shivered.

"Someone walking over my grave, perchance," she said lightly, blowing a ring of smoke into the air.

Eltrym had been having a battle with a cigarette. "I don't like it," she said to Cecil, putting it down disdainfully ; "it gets into my throat and burns my nose and makes me cough." And then, with a sigh : "Oh, it's been a glorious day ! I feel so happy." She had turned to him. "Will there ever be days like this again ?" And her voice was wistful as of one who

believes these things cannot last. "I don't like to see it go."

Cecil bent forward, forgetting everything else but that little face, flower-white in the dusk. His heart beat madly.

"They will come again; other days, more joyous days," he said, and his hand, thrilling and warm, touched hers for a moment.

Catherine, who had risen a second earlier to light up, stood by the window looking out on the yellow lights of the Thames, their flickering reflections in the water. She had been there when Cecil had spoken, and she closed her eyes tightly and seemed to listen, to wait for something to happen. The blood beat and drummed in her ears.

But it was John Gordon who was speaking now, asking Cecil something about stocks and shares. Catherine touched the brass electric knob and it clicked downward. The light shone out from its swaying cord in the centre of the room. She was glad that the rose shade over it, of crinkled paper made in the shape of a lotus bud, softened its merciless power. She felt it would have shown up the pallor of her face, the story in her eyes.

Now they were laughing and talking about dinner in Soho, just a quiet simple dinner.

"Peter must see Soho," chanted Sadie, "and Soho must see Peter—and Joseph. Yea, we must have Joseph!"

A chorus of dissent greeted her.

"Look here, young woman, if you think a respectable editor, of settled and law-abiding disposition, whose position in the editorial world is unique, is going to be seen out with that dog——"

"Or if a publisher before whom all staffs, except that of the said respectable editor, tremble at a glance, is going to Soho in company with Joseph——"

"Oh, we can't take Joseph, Sadie. You can't spin a tail like that," Catherine punned.

"Dear Joseph is going to stay at home and mind the

flat," said Eltrym, affectionately rubbing the hair of his dark head the wrong way. "Doesn't he look like the sweetest golliwog?"

But Sadie was in one of her most mischievous and most persuasive moods. She took possession of Joseph and became busily engaged in transferring the pink bow from his neck to the centre of his tail. She cocked her head on one side triumphantly with the air of an ecstatic French milliner viewing the latest creation of the season.

"*Mais oui, mademoiselle!* and *mais oui* two times, messieurs! Luke at zee small zing! Is it not what you call one *très chic* dog? Eh, presto! Zee bow right zere, and then, messieurs, one pin through zee far end of zee tail, and anuzzer pin zere where zee tail it begin, and, *voilà*, zere is no tail at all! Zere is but one large pink bow and but one small dog—and all zee people zay to me, '*Qu'est ce que c'est que ça, mademoiselle? Il est un diable adorable.*'"

Her small audience had no doubt about that, or of the lively effect on Joseph should two pins be stuck through his tail.

"Zee sensation of zee season!" declared Sadie earnestly.

But they went forth without Joseph. At least, they believed they did, and Catherine, thinking of the complaining ladies in the flat below, and Eltrym, hoping Joseph would not be so lonely or would chew all the roses off the chintz, were much relieved that the new addition to the household did not rend the air with his clamour.

"Most puppies do, I believe," said Catherine. She hesitated at the top of the stairs. "I wonder if I should give him to the porter to mind?"

"Oh, come on!" said Sadie, tugging at her arm. "Joseph will behave himself splendidly. I'm open to bet that those old ladies never hear a bark from him."

"I'll bet you," said Cecil, "a new hat to a tie that he howls the place down."

"Done!" said Sadie audaciously. She danced before them down the almost deserted pavement, with

her cloak fluttering about her, under one arm a muff tucked as if the night were cold; with her right hand, as they waited for the 'bus, she made a suggestive movement as if tilting on a new hat.

"Monsieur," she said to Cecil, "zee hat of your choice it suits me, is it not so?"

"My new tie," he observed calmly, "is to be of the best silk, dark blue, and from Bond Street."

Sadie curtsied in the face of three stolid-looking people who were waiting for a 'bus. To Sadie, people whom she did not know were always as if they were not. "Monsieur, I hear not zee howl of zee dog."

"No," said Cecil grimly, "but the old ladies have stall tickets for the recital."

"Cathie," said Peter, "*do* you think he will make a row and disturb them?"

Catherine laughed. "Well, if he does he does, and it can't be helped. My private opinion is that by now he will be asleep."

"My private opinion," observed John Montgomery Gordon, "is quite otherwise," and he glanced darkly in the direction of Sadie, who appeared not to hear.

They all clambered into the 'bus. The top was crowded because of the warm, clear night, and perforce they had to go inside. There were just seats enough, and Sadie settled herself in hers, which happened to be at the far end.

The stolid-looking trio of people who had also waited for the 'bus at the same junction sat opposite her, confronting her and staring at her with that solemn, bovine kind of gaze which is in no wise disturbed by the fact that the objects of scrutiny often show signs of discomfort, or impatience, or well-bred contempt.

They just stared on at Sadie, and Sadie, not to be daunted, stared back solemnly. It was of no use! Perhaps it was the French hat she wore, or her way of wearing it, or her mischievous imp-like face. Anyhow, it stirred a little devil in Sadie.

She turned to Cecil, a few seats from her and on the same side as the staring eyes. "Zee little Joseph," she

said with a seraphic smile, "you tink he ees very quiet, eh?"

The eyes stared more and disapprovingly of this gay foreign element in their midst. Cecil went red and looked intently elsewhere, determined to discourage this sort of thing in public. Sadie shook her head, bent forward, and took the stolid ones into her confidence.

"My poor husban'," she said sorrowfully, "he ees very deaf. He is what you call filled wis zee wax up to zere." She touched her ear daintily. "And he hears nuzzing, not even zee leetle Joseph cry."

They all turned and looked at the object of this misfortune intently. Gordon gulped hastily and stared out of the pane near him, as if not sure as to the exact neighbourhood. His shoulders shook.

"And," Sadie was saying earnestly and inviting the interested battery of eyes again, "he has lost zee tie, zee blue tie from Bond Street."

She beamed on them radiantly. "But I have not lost zee hat." This was mystery, indeed! Without any change of expression or any indication to say that they heard, save the simultaneously altered direction of their gaze, they stared at Sadie's hat.

Its pert black shape, its tilt, its audacious red rose offered no solution. It held their attention for a moment, but only for a moment.

There was a handkerchief now, dabbing under the hat's brim at weeping eyes which, however, had still the power of flashing one wicked provocative gleam in the direction of the editor of *The Eaglet*, who was as one aloof from all these things.

"Zee leetle Joseph!" cried Sadië, low and heart-broken. "They zay to me leave heem home. Let heem cry, and he is so young and weak. I have not zee heart——"

Indignation got the better of national reserve.

"You're quite right, mum," said one woman volubly, and she gave a hostile glance in the direction of the poor young thing's husband. She put a plump red hand of sympathy on that apparently sob-shaken knee.

What if she were foreign! Anyone could see she had a heart, to sob like that about her child!

"Yes, mum! Don't you take on so"—she also flung a withering glance to her left—"men is brutes, even the best of them! I know; I've just buried my second and there ain't going to be no more. No, not if I knows it! And your poor little Joseph! How old do you say he was, mum?"

Sadie's muffled voice answered from the depths of the handkerchief. Her shoulders heaved. "Just four months old."

A fastidious and stately lady to whom Gordon—glad, perhaps, to turn his back on Sadie—had politely given a seat, lifted a lorgnette and stared deliberately at that sobbing young person. She put it down again with a bored air. Really, the lower classes and their lack of repose were beyond description!

There was no doubt the passengers were interested, and Sadie enjoyed herself immensely. For all that, Gordon felt he could have soundly shaken her. Cecil wanted to laugh and Eltrym was staring at her, half wondering, half amused.

"Four months old, mum," the stout lady was saying soothingly. "Of course, you wouldn't like to leave the poor little thing home. Was there no one there to mind it at all, mum, if I may make so free? You should have brought it with you and let no man ride roughshod over you!"

Catherine smothered a laugh at that. Sadie was calmly undoing her cloak which, for some time, had been making suspicious movements. She wiped her eyes, suspiciously bright, and said humbly to her adviser:

"I am so glad zat you geeve me zat advice and zat I bring heem. Behold!"

With a flourish she brought a small dog and a large silk bow from under her cloak and dangled it before their astonished eyes. The stout lady remained with her mouth open. The conductor, an interested spectator, scratched his head and grinned. Cecil glanced hastily

in Sadie's direction, and then strange sounds came from him and John Montgomery Gordon. They rang the bell.

"Behold," said Sadie pleasantly, "zee leetle Joseph!"

It was well, perhaps, that they stopped the 'bus and got out hastily. The conductor stared after them and whistled thoughtfully. He poked his head into the compartment. "Them's queer folk, them furriners!" he contributed.

The stately lady closed her eyes wearily and in disdain at the ways of the masses. The large bosom of the sympathetic one heaved tumultuously. She breathed deeply, glaring of eye and very red of face. She raised her voice that it might be heard by all concerned.

"Them foreigners!" she said at last. "They're heathings, that's what they are, *I say!* They're nothing else but heathings!" And to this stern denunciation the 'bus rolled on.

The "heathings" stood on the pavement and laughed helplessly. Joseph, with that absurd pink bow on his tail, and Sadie's seraphic maternal expression and the upturned whites of her eyes as she bade the stout lady adieu, had been a sight for the gods. It made the company weak with laughter.

They had still a good walk because Cecil had stopped the 'bus before their usual stopping-place. But they walked through the teeming crowd and down the quieter streets of Soho, and into the "Petit Montagnard," because Sadie knew Madame, and Madame knew Sadie, and there was a wonderful new baby that Sadie must see.

Like a pack of children they trooped into the tiny restaurant with its coloured pictures on the walls, the "guessing competition-pictures," as Catherine called them.

"I'm not sure," she said gaily, "that the Angel-child should not have a veil over its eyes. Peter, you are requested to stare demurely into your soup."

Sadie not only knew Madame but apparently everybody else in the place, and, solemnly, Joseph, in all the

glory of the pink bow which would keep dropping off, was introduced to everybody. The door was ajar because the night was mild and the room warm. A breeze came wandering in at intervals, making the faded green shades with the black decorations sway gently. Somewhere near a barrel-organ was grinding out the latest music-hall song.

There were daffodils on the tables, and laughter and gay voices and much talk of art and literature mingled with the rattle of the dishes. In a far corner a young girl, not pretty but attractive in her clear English colouring and her neatly brushed hair, was breathlessly hanging on the words of the man who sat opposite to her. For them the laughing, merry world about them, even Joseph with his pink bow who had nearly succeeded in tripping the waiter, did not exist. Later they went out into the night and the stars and Cecil looked after them.

He found his own heart beating, too. Suddenly he also wanted Eltrym to himself at a little table in a corner where they might talk together and let the world go by.

He did not know, perhaps; nobody but Catherine knew, how these thoughts were mirrored in his eyes, and for awhile the laughter and the chatter of voices and the rattle of plates passed her. They left her on some suddenly lonely and desolate island, and all the while—causing her almost physical pain—the street-organ was playing its absurdly appropriate and questionable and haunting melody :

“Once there was only you and I,
In the days gone by, in a world gone by,
Now there are three, dear,
She, you and me, dear.”

Catherine rose. “I’m a little tired—the room is so close—if you will excuse me——” If she only could go now and alone !

But they were all finished, finished long ago, they clamoured. And it *was* warm in the room ! It would be splendid outside, in the fresh and starry night.

Another moment and the bustle and laughter and good-byes were over and they were out in the street. Sadie, with Joseph tucked under her arm, had lingered to see the baby. She adored babies. She declared she intended to have heaps and heaps of them. She had told them so at the table that night.

"But I shall never let them grow up!" she declared. "They will be always just babies. I shall give them something to stunt their growth, dissolve some magic potion. What is it that stunts growth? Gin and cigarettes, isn't it? Gordy, dear, will you give me a column to advertise the formula? I will try it on one or two, of course, at first, and then——"

"And then the coroner will gravely direct the jury to bring in a true and proper verdict."

So Sadie was now supposedly in earnest debate over the "Petit Montagnard" baby's cradle as to the propriety of stunting its growth. Catherine and John Montgomery Gordon walked on ahead. It had seemed natural that Eltrym and Anderson should follow slowly. But of this Catherine did not speak. She laughed lightly now and then, and chatted brightly, as usual, but between the talk and the laughter there fell silences that words could not fill. As they passed under the lamp her face showed white and weary.

She felt old, so old. And she was not yet twenty-seven. And Cecil was thirty, had been thirty. This new Cecil, boyish, teasing a little dog and tumbling it over, eagerly and openly adoring, was a revelation of recaptured youth.

And all these years she had loved him, had waited patiently, had felt that some day he would come to her as he had always come to her in other things, and say :

"Catherine, dear old Catherine, my very best chum, there is only you who have ever really understood me."

When his father's will had struck him that blow it had been to Catherine he had gone and told the facts of the case.

She had said to him then : "And do you or do you

not intend to give her up, Cecil?" And he had said: "I shall never give her up."

But it was the girl who, as soon as she discovered the contents of the will, had given Cecil up, and such are the complexities of the female mind that Catherine hated her for that more than ever.

"She had not even the decency," she said hotly, "to obscure her real reasons."

Cecil had got over it much quicker than Catherine expected. The quiet healing of Catherine's friendship had much to do with it. She was always there, his friend, his comrade, as she was always to her own sex in distress or need.

And it was significant of Catherine now that she neither blamed Cecil for falling in love with Eltrym Hardie, nor Eltrym for being the unconscious cause of her sorrow. She felt that Eltrym could not be long unaware. She wondered what it would mean to her, for she knew little more of this girl than she knew on the day she first came to the flat.

Eltrym never spoke of her past, as an English girl would. She kept all that worried her or made her unhappy to herself. But Catherine was aware that on more than one night Eltrym had not slept, that she sobbed softly into her pillow.

And when once, in passing Eltrym's room to the kitchen, she had heard this stifled weeping she had tapped on the door, and said gently:

"Are you awake, dear? Can I help you?"

There had been a silence. For a moment it seemed as if there would come no response, and then a voice had answered: "I was only—dreaming in my sleep, Cathie."

And Catherine, walking along the busy thoroughfare now, with the 'buses flashing and thundering by, as she thought of all the dreams that were woven about Cecil Anderson, said to herself piteously:

"That is it—I was only—dreaming—in my sleep!"

CHAPTER XXX

A VISITOR FROM PAISLEY

*The thing on the blind side of the heart,
On the wrong side of the door. . . .
There is always a forgotten thing,
And Love is not secure.*

G. K. CHESTERTON.

ALL of Catherine's indomitable will, as well as the sweet graciousness of her nature, was needed to carry her through the next few weeks.

Those of us who have been stunned by some unexpected blow know what it is to be as one paralysed, destined to sit aside and, with folded, helpless hands, watch our world go by slowly and relentlessly out of our reach.

Outwardly, to all intents and purposes, she went on with her work, sat late into the night and filled many sheets of paper, clipped them together in their several departments, and addressed them to various newspapers, or put some aside for future use.

She worked hard, and grew paler and thinner perhaps because of that, and often she shut herself in her sitting-room for hours because of a special rush of work. Yet she in no way gave up that hour sacred to the confidences of her friends and afternoon tea.

Her friends clattered up and down the stairs as usual, filling the landing with talk and laughter; they dashed like brilliant butterflies across corridors in the early mornings, kimonoed in startling colours, in and out of each other's rooms, and when Catherine's card, with its one word "Busy," denoted that there was an extra rush of work on, tiptoed away again without knocking, finger on lip, and spread the news in their own way :

"Cathie's struck a green patch—you can hear the scratch of her pen as far as Knightsbridge—she's unearthed a murder or something and spring fashions have got the go-by."

When they popped their heads in at the room of the girl who worked for American magazines the informers drawled their news nasally and gaily, or knelt down and bawled their tidings through the letter-box:

"Say, stranger, economical dishes for an uneconomical people have received the frozen mitt from Cathie. Heard the latest? Wal, Cathie's dropped soap into the carburetter of literature and things are stirring some! Guess and calkerlate you'll hear the dollars clink along this corridor shortly."

"Git!" said the American writer, with as much brevity as wit. "My characters don't talk like that a bit."

At tea-time they swarmed in on Cathie with a hum like a hive of busy bees and brought their separate donations to the feast; cakes and milk, and fresh scones from a little shop round the corner, and teased her riotously as they drank tea out of her dainty cups. It was all mad and merry and nonsensically happy, as things are when young people get together, full of *joie de vivre* as well as ambitions.

"Help!" wailed Sadie Logue, who was apt to be the maddest and merriest at such times, though when in a publisher's office, with a book trembling in the balance, she was a marvel of what an authoress should be. "Help! An idea has just given me concussion. Haha!" And she struck the approved buccaneering attitude, hand on hip, the other aloft. "I have found out your se-ca-ret, my lady Catherine."

A chorus of doubting voices demanded to share it.

"I believe," said Sadie, pointing dramatically, "I believe that all this surplus of work proves that Cathie has purloined Quack-Quack's job on the *Evening Syren*. How else explain those subtly tender allusions to Home Rule in that column which once was sacred to chats with chefs, pow-wows with politicians and publicans, and art of the artless ones of the amusement

world? Did not Cathie's great-grandmother come from County Cor-r-k?"

In a second, with a wild preliminary whoop to give effect to the picture, Sadie became an Irish colleen, Catherine's green chair-drape over one shoulder, and her feet pointed daintily for a jig.

She shook her short mop of hair about her eyes. "Begorra! 'twas from Cor-r-k she did come! She was after saying so herself only yesterday. And hence these pars in the column, delicately phrased injunctions, when a Sinn Feiner is behind the bars of public opinion, to stroke the poor thing's head gently and affectionately, and not to be afraid it will bite. Och! shure, me bhoys, trate it with more and more koindness, even if it has already bitten your other hand off—Catherine, spake to us, darlint. Do ye quack, or do ye not quack?"

Catherine was denying these aquatic accomplishments and all things in connection with them when a knock at the door announced Cecil Anderson and one or two others.

He came almost every day at this hour, and one or two of the girls smiled significantly as they shook hands with their own friends.

Cecil, after greeting Catherine, went to the group by the window-seat where Eltrym Hardie was.

Catherine saw with a swift throb of pain how the others, after a laughing word or two, moved off as a matter of course.

For a moment all the faces around her became a blur. Cecil had come back to help carry the teacups round, and with an effort she turned to him the bright smiling face he knew.

"You're looking a bit used up, Cathie," he remarked. "Busy?"

"I've got quite a lot to do."

He nodded. "So have I. Just managed to seize this hour to get down here. You don't know how I look forward to it."

"I think I can guess." Her voice was kind but a

little breathless when she said that. Cecil smiled on her and pressed her hand as he took a cup of tea she held out for him.

"Dear old Cathie," he said, and he went off to the window-seat again.

Perhaps that had been the hardest moment of all for Catherine Richards. It was as if she had given him her blessing, and bidden him go, with the best wishes of her heart to give him courage.

Once she glanced across to them. He was talking as usual, oblivious of the room, and Eltrym was listening eagerly. Catherine's eyes rested for one second on her unconscious face.

"She doesn't know," her mind said to her. "I believe she doesn't care."

Sadie came up to Catherine for more tea, grumbling softly. "There's that publisher-friend of yours, Cath, and I never get a chance to speak to him. I want to assure him, in a nice subtle way and without the slightest hint of patronage, what a delight it would give me to see his name on the cover of my book. Peter is a little beast in the way she monopolises him. I can't get a word in." She glanced pensively in their direction. "The Scratch-Cat says that he knew her when she was a barefooted child, but I don't think that altogether accounts for the fact that he is quite oblivious to *my* great talents."

Catherine laughed, glad that Sadie's tongue raced on.

"I heard him tell her, Cath, that the book of poems is to be published to-morrow, and she took it as calmly and as matter-of-fact as if she had a book published every day in the week. I should have gone mad with delight and raced out of the room, both ears well back and my tail wagging, and bitten the respectable legs of the old ladies in the flat below, as a sort of relief to my feelings, and there is Eltrym saying more wearily than joyously, as if she were thinking of something else, 'Really? To-morrow!'"

Sadie added more seriously: "Catherine, do you think something will come of it?"

"Of the book, dear?" But she knew quite well.

Sadie dropped her voice: "I don't think she cares one bit. I can't imagine anyone in our set not caring for a publisher or a newspaper-proprietor, can you, Cathie? But there it is! Why, if it was me," with a splendid largesse of affection in her excitement, "I'd have fallen on his neck long ago and murmured in bell-like accents, 'Certainly, dearest, on condition you publish two or more books a year of mine, and allow me to draw up the agreement and adjust the scale of royalties.'"

"What nonsense you do talk, Sadie!" And Catherine laughed lightly. But afterwards when they were all gone Sadie's words came back to her. "I don't think she cares one bit—I don't think she cares one bit."

She turned to find Eltrym at the door. "Cathie, there's a man at the door with a package of books and half a conservatory"—she, too, was dropping into the little ways of speech and manner—"and he says it's for you and would you please sign?"

There were books and flowers and fruit. The hall was full of red tulips and scarlet geraniums and heath in pots. Catherine opened the note that came with them in silence. She had known instinctively from whom they came.

"With Cecil's compliments, and to be shared between us."

"Oh, isn't he good to us?" cried Eltrym. "Oh, and here's one packet for me!" She sat right down on the floor among the books, untied the string eagerly and tumbled them forth.

There were six volumes in pale blue, with a design of golden stars across the cover. The girl stared at them.

"Oh!" said Eltrym, and all of a sudden she broke down and hid her face in them. Her tears fell on the tiny golden stars. "Look, Cathie!"

"The Field of Stars" glimmered and flashed up at Catherine, shining out of their exquisite blueness.

"Peter, dear, I'm so glad." She turned to find Peter trembling exceedingly, her face white.

"I've never felt like this," she said huskily, "only once before—when I——"

And all of a sudden she stopped. She could not say to Cathie, "when I held my baby for the first time in my arms."

She got up and went quickly into her room and closed the door.

She was very quiet that evening. Cecil rang up Catherine, asking them both to dine in celebration, but she shook her head and would not go.

"You go, Cathie."

But Catherine was busy, it appeared, and could not or would not.

That evening more than once Eltrym nearly went to Catherine and told her everything. Once indeed she was as far as the door, her hand outstretched to knock. And then she heard Catherine sigh and the click-click of the typewriter. She could not go to-night while Catherine was tired and worried about her work.

"I will tell her in the morning," she whispered in the night, as she had done almost every night since she came. But in the morning Catherine had gone off early before she was up, and there was only Mrs. McFadyen making a great noise with a broom and dust-pan in Catherine's sanctum.

Catherine came back at eleven to find Eltrym had not yet gone out. She was radiant again and wearing her blue costume and her best blouse. She ran down a flight of stairs to meet Catherine.

"*The Eaglet's* compliments, and I was to have to-day off in order to calm down," she explained. "And Cecil rang up and is going to drive me out into the country, to that place you remember——"

Catherine stooped to tie her shoe-lace more neatly. "Yes—I remember——"

So it had come at last! It was to be to-day, then.

"We are going in half an hour. The car will be here at any moment. Oh, Cathie, how pale and tired

you look! Won't you come with us? The drive would do you good. Do!"

She was anxiously hovering around, her own face concerned, her yellow hair shining under the new blue straw hat that only yesterday Catherine had helped her to choose.

Catherine smiled and her lips moved stiffly: "I'm all right, Peter. Really I am. And I'm very busy, even if Cecil wanted me to come——"

"Of course he does. And he must." And then they heard the hoot of a car downstairs. Catherine stepped into the cool darkness of the hall. She gave Eltrym a little push.

"Go, dear! You mustn't keep him waiting. And it's such a glorious day——"

The hoot came again.

"Catherine, but won't you come?"

"Can't," said Catherine, smiling. "Some other day—glorious outside. Have a good time, Peterkins!" And then, with a wave of her hand, she shut the door.

Leaning against the other side of it she heard Peter go slowly downstairs. Catherine put up her cold hands to her face. In the semi-darkness of the square hall the red tulips gleamed dully as out of a mist. Slowly it cleared. Sound and hearing came back. She heard the heavy tread of Mrs. McFadyen coming down the corridor from the kitchen.

When Mrs. McFadyen came in Catherine was standing by the window looking down at the street below. The sun shone on the river, on the green trees in the square, on a ragged woman playing a barrel-organ and the red jacket of the dancing monkey. Catherine did not hear the music. She heard but one sound—the throbbing of the motor. Its pulsations set the very air in the room aquiver, or was it her heart? Then there was a toot-toot of warning and a car turned in the road below. In another second it had gone down the road and away.

Catherine sat down on the window-seat heavily. Hours seemed to pass. The spring cloak she was wear-

ing seemed heavy, and slowly, because her fingers seemed numbed, she drew it off.

Mrs. McFadyen knocked at the door and came in ponderously, rolling in her gait like a tramp-steamer at sea.

"There's afther bein' wan or two telephone calls, mum. And there is wan lady wot just came. She is afther having the wrong address, but she will not be believing it."

"What is she like?"

"Faith! she is a body from Scotland, mum. And she would not give her name."

Catherine turned her head slowly and looked at Mrs. McFadyen. "Does she want to see me? Did she ask for me?"

"Shure, mum, you'd better be seeing her yourself, I'm thinking, I can't understand her; and would ye be believing it, she said she could not understand me?"

Catherine got up slowly. It was an effort to move. She felt bruised all over. Her mind worked as if in a dream. She was only conscious that somebody had called, and Mrs. McFadyen was offended at something, and that she must go to the door.

She went across the hall where the red tulips still gleamed dully like veiled flame in the shadow of the oak-painted wall. Mrs. McFadyen had shut the door while she had gone to make inquiries, and Catherine in her hospitality felt a quick pang of compunction.

She opened the door to find a gaunt, grey-haired woman on the threshold patiently waiting, a woman clad deeply in black and with crape on her old-fashioned hat. Everything indeed was precise and old-fashioned and respectable about her from the ancient umbrella she carried to her prim square-toed boots. She looked at Catherine suspiciously.

"Miss Richards?" she inquired abruptly and with a decided Scottish accent.

"I am Miss Richards. Did you want to see me?"

"I want to see Mrs. Mackinnon."

"Mrs. Mackinnon?" Catherine looked at her in sur-

prise. She shook her head. "No! There is no one of that name here."

Then she thought of those two prim old ladies downstairs. She had thought both of them old maids. It would be one of them, of course. There was even, now she came to think of it, a strong family resemblance, due perhaps to the fact that they also wore black dresses buttoned high to the throat. Strange, that she had never contemplated the possibility of one of them being married! Why, they didn't *look* married somehow.

She pointed out their door. "I think it will be there——"

But the woman on the doorstep shook her head. She looked at Catherine suspiciously. "It is not there. I have been there myself. And I described the ledgy to the porter and he said he had seen her often: he thoct she had just gaun out in a motor-caur, but I kenned that could not be. And the number was 192, Thames-side Mansions, Chelsea."

Catherine's mind moved wearily and slowly that day. She had difficulty really in following what the woman was saying, but the last words, "The porter . . . just gone out in a motor-car," lingered with her.

"Oh, he means Peter, Miss Eltrym Hardie!"

There came a quick change over the face of the woman. Her face went a dull quick red. She stared at the paper she held in her black-mitted hands.

"Ay," she said, looking up from the paper, "this will be the place," and then, grimly, "it's Eltrym Hardie I'm wantin' to see. Is she no in?"

Catherine passed her hand across her forehead. How stupid she felt to-day, and her head ached so that she did not seem to hear clearly! This woman wanted to see Eltrym, and Eltrym was out. She wished she would go. Catherine pulled herself together:

"She has gone out. I'm afraid she will not be back until nearly six, perhaps later. Can I give her any message, or perhaps you could call to-morrow?"

The older woman shook her head. "I gang back to Scotland to-night, thank ye. I canna wait until the

morn. I came down this very morning especially to see her——”

“You have been travelling all night,” said Catherine involuntarily. She noticed then that the woman looked worn and tired. The red flush had gone and she was very pale. Catherine’s hospitable sense stirred slowly out of the apathy that hung over her.

Christina—for she it was—hesitated. She had been travelling all night and the tired lines showed in her face, haggard with sleeplessness.

“If I could wait, mebbe! I dinna mind the waiting and I’m no knowin’ my way about the city. I’m tauld it’s a wicked place for anyone alane. And my train doesna start till midnight.”

Catherine held the door open. “Of course you must come in. You could wait in her room. There are some books—you will forgive me if I cannot stay with you as I am busy—and I will send you in some tea. You look tired; perhaps you would like to rest.”

The elder woman sighed. She was indeed tired. She was a strangely humbled and chastened Christina, and she walked as one heavily troubled, as she followed Catherine down the brightly carpeted red corridor to Eltrym’s room.

She looked around at its daintiness and freshness, at the gay pink roses on the loose covers, the white muslin curtains frilled and fluttering at the window. Perhaps there came back to her the meaning of that cover which had met with such a chill reception and disastrous end at Glenside.

Catherine came back with the tea-tray herself to find her sitting there, a sombre figure, bolt upright in a chair, her umbrella still in her hand as if she feared Mrs. McFadyen had evil designs on it. Yet there was something pathetic in the very grimness and watchfulness of aspect.

“Won’t you take your hat and coat off?” Catherine ventured. She set the tray down. “Let me help you. And then after you have had tea you should rest——”

Christina obeyed in silence. And before she went

out of the room Catherine drew up the biggest and cosiest chair for her, wondered who she was, this grim silent woman. Was she any relation to Eltrym? How strange she had made the mistake of calling her Mackinnon! As she went to the door she turned to Christina: "I shall tell her you are here as soon as she comes in. Shall I say what name?"

"Ay!" said she. "You can tell her Miss Christina Mackinnon."

"Mackinnon," repeated Catherine slowly, "Christina Mackinnon."

Why, that was the very name the woman had asked for at the door! The mist cleared a little. She remembered now. Her eyes turned questioningly to that gaunt upright figure.

"You asked for Mackinnon at first, didn't you? It is not Miss Hardie, after all, that you want to see."

"Ou ay," said Christina, "it's a' the same: she's my brither's wife."

CHAPTER XXXI

"FALLING LEAF AND FADING TREE"

I plucked your flower, O World!

I pressed it to my heart and the thorns pricked.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

HIGH in the clear, windless blue the rooks were slowly wheeling and cawing over the spire of the grey old church. The ancient elms towered, tall and dark and still, their branches stirless and peaceful like the folded hands of devotion.

The old village of Kimble was steeped in sunshine that day, one of those clear, gracious days that come unexpectedly ere April's budding. It was a day Cecil Anderson and Eltrym were long to remember.

The car went more slowly now, following the winding road past Chequers Court, which stood aloof, stately and beautiful and serene, its roofs gilded with sunshine. In the woods last year's carpet of leaves, gorgeous in brown and russet and flame and darting arrows of gold, still remained.

Beyond were the hills, low and blue, and presently as the road turned and the village came into sight, the friendly inn of the "Red Lion," almost hidden by the trees, its pots of red geranium in the window, begonias in the white porch, its garden gay with flowers. A child in blue ran out of a cottage and waved its fat hand to them. The scene was so still and quiet, so full of old-world peace.

Eltrym's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Is it real? I feel, if I were to shut my eyes and open them again, it would all have vanished—even you!"

"I should be here always," said Cecil, and, splendidly in love, he smiled at her, his boyish face radiant.

But she did not hear him. She was looking at the child in the blue frock sitting on the ground and gurgling joyously in the sunshine. In the orchard behind the inn a gardener was scything the grass between the trees with a slow, sweeping, rhythmic movement.

"It is all so lovely! If one could only be an artist and paint it!" She turned to Cecil eagerly. "Do you think there could ever be such another day as this, so full of sunshine and happiness?"

"Ever and ever so many days," said Cecil. "The best of them is yet to come."

She turned her fair head questioningly, wistfully at that. "You speak as if you are sure, quite sure——" And then she stopped. "Can one be sure of anything for very long?"

Cecil walked beside her as they went towards the open door of the inn. "You can be sure of one thing." His voice was unsteady.

She looked up at him quickly and saw that his face was pale with tenseness of feeling. "And that?"

But he shook his head and laughed. "Not now; I will tell you later." And he laughed happily, as if Joy came dancing down the flagged path towards him. "Come—we will go indoors, and look at the village afterwards. You must be starving."

The cheerful, smiling landlord bustled to meet them. Yes, he had received the telegram and the lunch waited their convenience. They passed into the cool, dim sitting-room which, they found, they had to themselves.

Eltrym had untied the veil from the blue hat and laid it on the sill beside her. The window was open, and the short curtains fluttered ever so slightly and the delicate half-lilac blue of the lobelias quivered. They glowed palely behind Eltrym's shining head.

Cecil looked at her, then suddenly he put his hand across the table. "*Peter——*"

The door opened and a stout, cheery waiter came bustling in, in a worn black dress-suit with a clean table

napkin across his shoulder. He beamed on them with an air of being in the secret, which puzzled Eltrym somewhat. She looked after him as he went out of the room for more plates and dishes.

“Do you notice how his eyes crinkle up at the corners when he looks at us? He seems immensely pleased with us and himself and the old world.”

“Perhaps,” said Cecil, and he went very red, “he thinks we are a honeymoon couple.”

She laughed lightly. “Does he really? How funny! I never thought of that. What a joke for Catherine, or Sadie, if they were only here! What a pity we didn’t bring Sadie!” She laughed softly at the pictures that mention of Sadie conjured up. “Wouldn’t there have been fun!”

“She would certainly have acted up to the waiter’s expectations, if not more,” agreed Cecil with hardly as much enthusiasm. “The whole village would have been out *en masse*. I’m very glad Sadie isn’t here. This is our day, Peter.” There came a new note into his voice. “Absolutely ours, yours and mine; and no one, not even the waiter, is going to take it from us!”

She stirred, and the long lashes drooped suddenly on cheeks that flushed slowly. She was suddenly afraid, breathless, she knew not why. She was glad the waiter came in then, and, with a flourish of the napkin, dispersed imaginary crumbs from the snowy cloth ere he set the dishes.

Somehow, in this last moment, Cecil Anderson was no longer the publisher, or Catherine’s friend, and one of the circle of friends she was making. All at once he had flamed forth out of the background. When he had looked at her in that way he had set her heart throbbing. She found her hands trembling as she lifted the glass of wine to her lips, and set it down again.

“Don’t you like it, Peter?” he said to her. “Would you care for any other kind? Clicquot or Goulet, perhaps? We can see what the beggar has in stock.”

She shook her head without looking at him. “No, thanks! I don’t like any of it, really.”

"Would you rather have anything else, Peter?" His eyes offered her the world as they looked at her bent face earnestly watching the bubbles fizzing and working in the frail thin-stemmed glass.

She was very shy, suddenly very quiet to-day, this lady of his heart, but he was, for the time being, at any rate, content silently to adore. He would not speak to her of love now, but presently, as they walked across the green meadows, perhaps, or sat in the shade of the beeches, and afterwards there would be the drive home against the sunset.

He felt a throb of renewed tenderness towards her when she had answered that she would prefer a glass of buttermilk, if he did not mind—a request that seemed to amuse the waiter mightily, if secretly.

They were to come back for tea at four, and after lunch they went out into the garden for a while, and then to explore the village.

They walked down the road in the afternoon sunshine, and then across the fields where, by the beeches, a great patch of bluebells, like a sea, showed and rippled. In the woods, too, the bluebells were in bloom, sun-bright on the ridges, misty like a dream in the hollows. They sat on a fallen log amid that sea of blue. A rabbit scuttled once out of a mound of leaves by the trees and past them. In the tree-tops above them a thrush was singing, pouring forth a flood of exquisite melody. Then it ceased, and the world about them went to sleep again.

And all at once Eltrym said, as if to herself: "It is all like a dream," and suddenly, "I shall wake up, and it will be all terrible!" She put up her hand in a queer, groping way across her eyes in a pitiful gesture. She whispered, "There will be no day like this in all the world again!"

"*Peter!*" Startled, he put out his hand, and then, as his hand touched her cold one, he caught her to him. All he had intended to say went from him.

"Peter darling—my little sweetheart!"

And then she sat up and thrust him away; she said something that he could not catch. She half rose as if

to run away, and then suddenly and uncontrollably she burst into tears.

“No—no!”

“Peter,” he said in a choked voice, “Peter, don’t turn away from me like that! You know I love you, dear. I did not mean to tell you just yet, but I couldn’t bear to see you looking like that. Don’t cry, dearest; I only want to make you happy.”

But she still kept her hands pressed against her face.

Cecil put out his arm and drew her gently towards him. He patted the bent head.

“There, there, Peter dear! You are not to cry. Did I frighten you, my dear little love? For, you know, you must have seen I cared, didn’t you, Peter?”

She shook her head.

“But you know now, dear; and, if there is anything that is worrying you and making you unhappy, you will tell me, won’t you?” He lifted her hands gently down from her face, dried her eyes with his own handkerchief. “You will tell Cecil, won’t you, darling?”

She muttered something inarticulately. She did not stir for a moment from the warm protecting curve of his arm. In her desolation it was something that she clung to for a space, a space that could never come again.

He took her hand now and pressed it gently. “I love you, Peter, and before God I will do all I can to make you happy. Oh, I know you’ve not been altogether happy. I’ve seen it at times, even when you’ve been laughing and chatting with the others. And there were times also when you were lonely, when I wanted to speak and could not.”

She did not answer. She seemed to be gathering strength of mind and body for a moment that must arrive.

“But it doesn’t matter how long we have known each other, does it, Peter? Love can come in an instant. Why, dear, I believe it must have come a long while ago and I did not know it. Perhaps when I saw you, that little child on that day in the old shepherd’s hut,

or that day by the churchyard gate. You were coming out, and you were all in grey—do you remember?”

“Yes.” And her hands locked together and her voice was like a cry. “I remember.”

“I wanted to come back then. It was curious, wasn’t it?” He turned and saw her eyes looking at him strangely. He turned his loving face towards her. His eyes shone. “If I had come back then——”

She said in a queer, breathless way: “Even then—it was too late!”

He turned and looked at her in astonishment. She sat up, and looked at the sea of bluebells.

She said again: “It was too late—then.”

The words seemed to echo over and over again in the woods about them; though they had been so low he had to bend his head to hear.

He straightened, his face very white. He could not speak.

“Yes, I remember the day,” Peter was saying, and she spoke in a voice that sounded strange and far away. “You went driving by. I remember how the sun shone on the harness and made it gleam like silver, and how the horses tossed their heads, and I was coming out of the gate. I was not alone. Sandy was with me.”

And now it was he who began to tremble. “Sandy?”

“It was the day that Sandy and I were married.”

He uttered a strangled cry: “No, Peter, no! You married! My God, I can’t believe it! Tell me you are teasing me.” He fell suddenly on his knees before her, hid his face against her dress. “It is not true. Say it is not true.”

She shook her head. She passed her hand across her eyes with that indescribably weary gesture. Her face quivered.

“It is quite, quite true.” And then she bent and pressed her forehead against his fair head. She was crying brokenly now.

“Don’t, don’t,” said Cecil hoarsely. He put his arm round her, for just one second she clung to him, and they looked at each other.

“Kiss me,” Cecil said desperately, “kiss me of your own will, for the first and last time. Then it’s good-bye to everything. Oh, Peter, *Peter!*”

She lifted her face and he felt her lips. The rain of her tears touched his cheek as well.

Then he had gone, flinging away into the wood. She heard the crashing of the branches, the dried brushwood under his feet. She leaned her face against the cold trunk of the tree, wishing dully that she might die.

The light was fading, the shadows lengthened, and from the hollows the mist gathered and crept, chill and damp, about her. Then she heard Cecil’s footsteps heavy and slow on the path. She opened her eyes to find him beside her, haggard and drawn of face, incredibly changed.

He held out his hand to help her rise.

“Come,” he said gently, “it is growing late.”

They went out of the wood to find the sun was setting swiftly. Across the fields they saw the car by the door of the inn. Even as they looked the stout, red-cheeked waiter came out and gazed up and down the road, shading his eyes from the sun as if expecting them.

Somehow they returned to the inn where the tea waited, drank it and talked. It is strange how in the big crisis of life things go on apparently in their ordinary course—“business as usual,” though a hemisphere is in flames.

Once when the waiter went out of the room Cecil spoke across the table at Peter. He lifted the teacup. “Peter! Let us drink together to one thing which life, even if we never see each other again, shall not take from us. We have had this day——” And then he could say no more.

They drove home when the last of the sunset faded. Somehow they could not face that glorious pageant of rose and gold.

When they came to the street by the Thames the car went more slowly. Cecil helped her out in silence. His lips quivered.

"It's good-bye, Peter."

And all at once his iron control gave way and he held her in his arms tightly. "Peter, I can't let you go. There must be some way out. We will find some way. I don't care what the world says."

He bent her head back and kissed her passionately. He did not care if in that quiet street, deserted at that hour, the whole world had seen him. A kind of savagery seized him.

"Peter, don't go in. I feel that if I let you go now it will be the end. Peter, come to me!"

They heard the sound of steps on the stone stairs and the strip of hall that led to the door. He let her go until they should pass on their way out.

The glass doors swung open. A dark figure, bare-headed, stood on the threshold.

"Peter!" it called gently.

It was Catherine.

Eltrym came across the pavement, stumbling as she walked. Her eyes were half closed and she walked as one blind.

Catherine looked from one to the other. She saw that Cecil knew. She put her arm about Eltrym.

"Peter dear," she said, and her voice was piteous, "Christina is here."

CHAPTER XXXII

HALF-LOAVES

"This poor half-loaf is burnt and dried"
"But it is bread," they said.

CHRISTINA was waiting for her, sitting bolt upright in the least comfortable chair in the room, her black-clad form and uncompromising hat silhouetted stiffly against the frivolous background of chintz and roses.

She heard the reluctant dragging feet of Eltrym come down the corridor and stop outside the door, as if the owner paused to gather strength for the encounter. Then the handle turned and Eltrym came in.

Christina had come to make her go back, to think of the elders and the neighbours and all the other things around which Glenside revolved.

For the moment the two women looked at each other, and there was a sense of hostility, of tenseness in the atmosphere. Eltrym stood in the middle of the room and looked at her sister-in-law: "You wanted to see me, Christina."

"Ay."

Eltrym did not sit down, but as she stood her dust cloak slipped back from her shoulders. She was far aloof from Christina and all that Christina stood for. She obviously waited for her to state her business and be gone.

A swift spasm passed over Christina's face. But she said doggedly. "I came to ask you to come back."

"Then you came in vain," said Eltrym. "I do not intend to go back. Can you expect it? I am young and I want to live. I am going to live, do you hear?"

So all your words will be but wasted, Christina. That is not life at Glenside."

And Christina said with sudden fierceness, "Ay, do ye think *I* never kenned that?"

Her hands clenched on the top of the umbrella. "Do you think I was never young, Eltrym, that I didna want something out of life I never had? It a' came back to me as I sat in this room an' waited, and some of the lassies cam' in and out to see ye, and awa' again when they saw me here. They didna want to talk wi' an auld woman."

And then all at once her voice trembled. Her steel eyes softened somewhat as she looked at Eltrym:

"I wasn't aye auld."

Eltrym turned her head and stared at her. That Christina, of all women, should talk like this! She could not speak. She looked and looked at Christina's sallow, haggard face, its deep-lined forehead under the grey hair. She noticed, with almost a sense of shock, that Christina had greatly aged since she had last seen her. Her eyes were red-rimmed and dark-circled with sleeplessness and worry.

She said involuntarily: "Then why did you stay? Why didn't you go?"

And Christina said, quietly enough now: "I couldna fly in the face o' Providence. I had to choose between duty and my ain selfish feelings. There was ma mither ailing, doomed to be an invalid, and we couldna afford a nurse."

She swallowed abruptly and stared at the carpet, the rose Du Barri carpet. "There was Sandy still at schule, and my feyther hard put to it to provide the guid schooling and a' the extra things for an invalid—and when Jamie Robertson cam' down the road I had to send him awa'."

For a moment in that room, a shrine for gay, innocent and happy girlhood, Christina lived through them again, those days which she had thought forgotten, which long ago she had doggedly thrust from sight. But in the hours that she had sat there, waiting for

Eltrym, the corridor without had resounded with laughing voices, the tapping of high heels, the rustling of skirts, and cheery calls from one room to another.

Two or three of the party were going off for an afternoon *matinée*. They talked at the top of their high girlish voices about the special tea afterwards. They danced along the corridor in sheer joyousness, dashing in and out of each other's rooms desperately at the last moment for the loan of a scarf, or a brooch, or somebody's second-best hat.

Once, like a flock of gaily coloured birds in their new spring dresses, they had flown into Eltrym's room for something, a loan of the pink linen cushions perhaps, or a chair for the special tea, and they were startled by Christina sitting there so prim and stiff, as if they saw a ghost.

They had apologised and backed out of the room, and then whirled clamorously down the corridor, whispering excitedly farther on, stifling laughter.

And Christina had sat there and watched the sunlight die slowly out of the room, and perhaps went over again the years of her life since she was young like that.

For years before her mother died she had nursed and tended her, and kept the house clean and tidy, and cooked and darned and mended. And there was the old grandfather, too, for whom she was now wearing this ponderous crape; he had had to be fed like a child, dressed like a child. There had only been Christina to do it.

So it had gone on, year after year, and she had watched her girlhood fade, and die slowly like the sunlight in this room. She had not always been hard. She had not always been bitter. But those years had robbed her of something they could never give back.

She had been pretty once, laughing and happy once, so that Jamie Robertson looked more than once at the window as he passed. He had waited for years and then he had married quite suddenly. Her mother had never known, and Christina was determined that she should never know how much her daughter had suffered, and

that shell of reserve around Christina had grown harder and tougher with the years. And when her lover had found someone else, and her mother had died, there had been only Sandy left to live for.

Sandy had been so little then, a mere schoolboy, and Christina had loved him more than any creature in the world, save, perhaps, Jamie Robertson. She had to be mother as well as sister to him. In her silent way she adored him. He had been the one green living thing in a heart where everything else seemed to have withered.

Christina had never wanted Sandy to marry at all, perhaps, but if he did, both she and her father had set their hearts on someone for him, a quiet, friendly young body who was good to Christina and fond of Sandy's father as well as of Sandy; a body who was a wealthy Elder's daughter and so well provided with goods, worldly as well as spiritual.

And then Sandy unexpectedly had announced his engagement and his wedding in one breath. He had brought back to Glenside—where Christina was reluctantly considering the Elder's daughter—a slip of a girl from Strachur way, with whom they could have nothing in common.

Christina had felt fiercely that she, this new sister-in-law of hers, had robbed her of something that the Elder's daughter could never have had. Christina had been glad, fiercely glad, when at last the newcomer had gone from them. It had been Christina herself who had found, in the publisher's letter Eltrym had dropped on the staircase, the one clue to her whereabouts. And relentlessly she had burned it. She had seen the last of her, ay, and she was fiercely glad. She had told no one of her discovery.

Life would go on more nearly as she had planned it. Sandy was hers again, her brother indeed, as the son she might have had. All the concentrated passion of Christina's emptied life was in her love for him.

But life does not go on as we arrange it. There come unexpected happenings, great crises of which we have

neither thought nor conception. All the fabric of Christina's dreams had been rudely broken, torn down and trampled on.

She had been talking in a fairly level voice, speaking aloud her thoughts, walled up behind the years of repression. Now the gates were open and they flooded forth. Then without warning Christina broke down and began to cry.

There was something so inexpressibly mournful in the picture of that gaunt broken woman beaten to the earth. Eltrym looked at her and a lump rose in her throat, and presently she went over to Christina and knelt beside her, one hand on her shoulder. She was filled with a great compassion, not unmixed with shame.

"Don't cry, Christina," Eltrym said gently. "I am sorry; I didn't know; I wish I had known; it would have made things easier." And then she looked at Christina piteously. "But it's too late now, Christina. I can't go back. You will try to understand that, won't you? That it is useless to ask me."

Christina lifted her grey distorted face.

"I came—because I had to." She was breathing heavily now. "There was something I had to tell you. It was about Sandy." She buried her face in her shaking, wrinkled hands.

"Sandy!" whispered Eltrym. A sword seemed to pierce her brain as she looked at the grey bent head, in its utter abasement.

And as she sat there the story Christina came to tell slowly unfolded. She saw it move before her eyes like pictures on a film. She saw Christina and the father, the kind father whom she had grown to like, suffering intensely. This latest sorrow which Sandy had brought on them had bowed their heads so that they felt they could never live in Glenside again.

Sandy had "gane wrang." The night his wife had left him he had flung out of the house and away after reading her letter. And Sandy, Sandy the sober and industrious, the son of a sober and righteous man who had never a drop of drink in his house, Sandy had

come home in the early hours of the morning helplessly drunk.

Somebody from one of the smaller, meaner streets, a graceless rascal at that, had brought him home, and for that day Sandy, who had never missed a day, had not gone to school.

That had not been the end. For all that the old man had sat on his bed and talked to him as an Elder as well as a deeply astonished father should, Sandy had continued on his way.

For a while they sat back and waited, Christina and her father—one could imagine the picture. The hour when the hands of the clock struck and Sandy did not come home as usual; and when he did come, the lurching, heavy steps on the path told their own tale. To them, in the narrow circle of their lives, with their strict views on temperance and their dread of neighbours' opinions, there came a horror and degradation which folk who designate themselves as broad-minded can never understand.

But Eltrym understood. The severe voice of the Presbyterianism she had known as a child came thundering down the years. Stern, uncompromising, adamant in its views of right and wrong, it hurled her before the bar of judgment. And it spoke to her relentlessly of duty, too.

"Life is duty," it said to her. "Love is sacrifice."

And with that there came to Eltrym the memory of that hour when she stood in St. Paul's Cathedral in the pearly dimness, and there against the grey wall she saw something that gleamed dully out of the darker shadows; she saw again the drooping folds of the flag that the gallant Scots had won, when the last of the pipers played amid the shot and shell of a battle never to be forgotten, and the battered and broken trenches.

And the flag said to her "Life is duty," and again, "Love is the forgetting of self—and both are sacrifice."

Christina's quiet voice had come to an end.

Sandy had been ill, very ill with pneumonia. There

had been a grim battle of life or death in that room where Eltrym once had sat and sang as she sewed the cheap chintz that had so tragically faded.

And perhaps to Sandy, even in delirium, had come the memory of that day, of his wife's bent head, and his own impatience and criticism. He had called for her constantly, and that was perhaps one of the bitterest hours in Christina's life, as, worn with sleeplessness, she had bent over him and said :

"I will bring her back, Sandy. I will bring her back."

The crisis was over, but Sandy did not get better, as the doctor had hoped. He lay, from day to day, growing weaker instead of stronger. He never spoke of Eltrym. He was very gentle with Christina and patient with his father and his admonitions.

Perhaps for the first time he saw himself in the rôle of mentor, and knew how the spirit shrank and sickened under it.

He said not a word, but Christina knew. She knew when the doctor, pursing his lips, and fitting his fingers together, stared at her, and said :

"He does not get better. I wish we could do something. It is our duty, one to another, to do what we can."

And then he went away and left that thought to smoulder like a live coal in the mind of Christina, poor Christina whose whole life had been duty.

Christina had not failed even then. Perhaps he was aware of that when he spoke. He had known Christina since a child, and maybe he knew also all there was in her mind. There is no doubt, anyway, that he admired her tremendously, and perhaps never more so than on the day following when Mackinnon senior said to him simply, "Christina has gone," and with a nod to the sick-room door, "you'll say nothing to him. One never knows."

To Eltrym, standing in that far dimness by the blood-stained flag, her eyes closed, it was as if some heavy band across her forehead slowly loosened. She had

been deaf and blind, it seemed, to everybody and everything else but herself.

She looked down the long avenue of the years and saw the hard road Christina had travelled uncomplainingly. She saw her grow slowly old and silent.

She opened her eyes and looked at Christina, and there was Christina stiff and silent and grim.

Eltrym looked at her oddly and then past her. Her lips trembled.

"I see now," she said slowly, "that you were right to come. I thank you, Christina."

The older woman said nothing.

Eltrym looked round the room, and a sudden rush of tears came to her eyes. She made, perhaps, one last bid for all that the room meant.

"Then—it was the doctor that really sent you, Christina. It wasn't Sandy."

Christina paused; her lips were dry. Then she flung up her grey head: "I won't lie to you; Sandy did not say a word. He didna ken I was coming. He thinks I am gaun to my aunt's. Even if he had kenned it"—she hesitated, then went on—"even if he had kenned he would have sent nae message. Ye ken that weel."

Eltrym's voice trembled: "Yes, I know that. Then he does not need me, Christina, after all?"

For a moment more Christina had hesitated. Then all her defences went down. She turned on her sister-in-law fiercely:

"I have said I will tell ye nae lee. He said no word then, but when he was ill, when he was deleerious, he called and called for ye. There was no one else he wanted, neither his faither, broken up wi' it a', nor me, his sister, who had nursed him, day and nicht, who had brought him up frae a wee lad and skimped and went gladly without clothes so that he might be educated—there wasna enough for the twa of us then—and there he lay, i' the auld bed and maybe deein', and it wasna Christina he called for, it was for nane but yersel'."

There was a moment's silence. Eltrym had gone to the window. The blinds were as yet undrawn, and across the road the dark tree-tops showed against the silver haze of the sky. The lights gleamed by the flowing water and outlined the bridge. The road was clear as day. She remembered poignantly how on that first night she had looked out of this very window and had seen the bridge at the hour when, on this side, it was a blaze of light, and on the other, the Surrey side, almost in darkness.

She had said then : "It is like my life. I have found a bridge and I have come over it and left behind the shadows and the darkness. I have come on to the lighted side of the road."

And now must she retrace her steps, go back again into the shadows and the darkness, and the uncertainty of the future. Could she go ?

And then suddenly there came to her the vision, not of the bridge, nor the flag in the cathedral of St. Paul, but the face of a lad, his arms full of roses, looking up to a big window.

"I have brought you all the roses I could find," he had said.

He had brought her roses, and there were the thorns as well in the gift. That was life. That was marriage.

And now it was Sandy's face she saw, wan and grey against the pillows as Christina had described it, lying like that all day, in that grim room ; Sandy, poor Sandy, staring at the window, the window with those hideous green rep curtains, and across the road those hideous roofs and chimney-pots, all alike. Poor Sandy ! He would be so dreadfully sorry, though he would say nothing, and the father, too, who meant so kindly but would talk so heavily, and who would read out those parts of the Scripture most applicable to the home tragedy. She could almost hear him now : "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging ; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

But Sandy—had Sandy broken away and gone too far on that passionate road of rebellion to turn back ?

Or would he drift aimlessly like a rudderless ship, with no sense of direction?

There came to her the memory of the day when she and Sandy trod the hills by Bald Gourie and she had told him shyly of her childish beliefs, of the road that went on, winding by the bend. The smell of the heather was in her nostrils, she saw the shining of the water, and she heard Sandy's voice as then:

"Let me walk by you on the road," Sandy had said. "I have need of you."

That night when Catherine switched off the light in the hall and the sitting-room she glanced down the corridor towards the end room. No light showed above the transom, and yet she instinctively knew Eltrym was not asleep.

She tapped at the door and then opened it.

"Are you asleep, Peter dear?" she said, and then came across to the bed and knelt down beside it. "I wanted to say good night to you. You don't mind my coming in for a while."

"I am glad you came, Cathie. I think I was waiting for you ever since Christina went."

She sat up, and in the bar of moonlight that fell across the bed Catherine saw that she was as yet undressed. She held the puppy in her arms, one shining plait of her hair falling over its dark body.

"I have been lying awake looking at the moonlight—and thinking."

Catherine took her hands in the darkness and pressed them gently.

"And I have been trying to see things as I should see them. It is very hard at times to be unselfish, Cathie."

"Yes, it is very hard," said Catherine; she knew.

Eltrym bent her head down until her forehead touched Catherine's trembling hands.

"Not for you, dear. You are always unselfish. But I can look back and see that I wanted too much out of life, that I wanted to be free when I was not free. I

wanted to forget and I could not quite forget. It was because I wanted that so badly that I did not tell you everything, Cathie. I could not."

She raised her head and in the half-darkness her eyes were shining with tears as she looked at her friend.

"You will forgive me for that, won't you, Cathie? You have been the best friend I have ever had, shall ever have in the world, the dearest friend, the most generous of women." She was sobbing now.

Catherine put her arm about her gently.

"There is nothing to forgive. We all have something that we keep to ourselves, locked in our hearts. We cannot bare our hearts for the world to see; even from our dearest friends we have our secrets."

Her clear, gentle voice trembled ever so perceptibly as she went on. It cost her a great deal those words she was saying now. She looked clear into the future as she spoke them, seeing so well all that it meant to her, the passing of the sweetest of all dreams out of her own life. But had she not watched that pass yesterday?

"If you want to be free, Peter, you were quite right to run away. You know I have always maintained that one has a right to live one's life in one's own way, that no one else has a right to interfere or impose conditions."

She turned her face, white in the moonlight.

"And, Peter dear, I say it right from my heart, it is not too late for you to draw back. If you desire to stay here no power on earth can stop you from doing so. And if any of these people should come again I will see that they do not disturb you in any way. If you do not want to go back you shall not go, and that ends the matter. You know, dear, that we will stick to you, all of us, the ones that most matter to you, dear old Gordon, and Sadie and I and—and—Cecil."

For the life of her she could not help the break that came then. She could not go on.

"Catherine!" Eltrym's voice was almost indistinct.

Her eyes were wide, and she held the dog very close against her.

Catherine's heart gave a great sob.

"I *must* go"—her voice sounded thin and tired. "I can see that now. I am going and I must not come back. I have taken vows and I must keep them."

And then she leaned her cold cheek against Catherine's.

"It will be good-bye, Cathie"—and now her voice faltered. She closed her eyes. "I want you—to say good-bye to—to all the people who cared. Will you tell them that I sent—my love—and my remembrances—that I wished them well—and I will never quite forget?" She clung to Catherine suddenly. "You—will say that for me?"

"I will," said Catherine, very low.

They clung together and kissed. There was no need for further words.

"Good night, Cathie. I have not prayed for a long while, but I shall pray for you to-night, that God will bless you, will give you your heart's desire."

Did she know? Had there come to her the truth at last? Catherine could not speak. She groped her way to the door and stood outlined against its whiteness for a moment. How far had knowledge helped Peter in her decision?

"Good night, Peter!" The tears were in her voice.

"Good night, Cathie dear!"

She held the dog very tightly to her as the door closed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE ROSES OF YESTERYEAR

*Words are so weak
When love has been so strong,
Let silence speak.*

ERNEST DOWSON.

THE door opened and Cecil came in. He closed it behind him and stood still, his hands pressed against the panels.

He looked at Catherine. "It is true, then; Gordon has not lied? Or Mrs. McFadyen? Peter has gone?"

Catherine looked away from his haggard face, grey and drawn with sleeplessness. She had not seen him so strongly moved before. There was something unfamiliar, almost terrifying, in the change in him.

"It is true."

Cecil did not move. His eyes, a trifle bloodshot, were still fixed on Catherine. She had risen from her writing-table at his entrance. The pen in her hand shook violently as with ague. He could only see her thin profile, her neatly braided dark head as she stared at the bowl of rose-leaves on the window-sill.

He watched, as if fascinated, the pulse that beat in her slim white throat.

"Then you knew," he said suddenly. "You knew last night, perhaps, and you did not tell me. When I rang up and asked for Peter and you told me she was asleep, you knew then. She had made up her mind to go?"

"Yes."

His face worked in an ugly fashion. He turned on her: "I should have come along and insisted on seeing

Peter," and he flung the words at her. "If I had seen her she would not have gone. I would not have let her go."

"I—think she knew that, Cecil." She was almost inarticulate. How brown and dead were the rose-leaves in the bowl! They were roses Cecil had given her a year ago. Her eyes half closed. "I knew it, too."

"Then you lied when you said you gave her the message?"

She shook her head. "I gave her the message." Her voice carried conviction. "She had already come to a decision." Her voice was so quiet, yet so deeply stirred, that he made a violent effort to control himself.

"She went away," Catherine went on, "by the ten train this morning. Sadie and I and John Gordon saw her off."

She paused until more strength had come to her. "Because I was her friend and your friend she gave me a message. She asked me to say good-bye, that it meant for ever, and that she could not come back—she said she would never quite forget."

She sat down suddenly on the seat by the window, bent her head and looked at her hands lying palm open and listless in her lap. The wind stirred her soft dark hair.

There was a long silence.

"She—said that?" said Cecil hoarsely. He was breathing deeply as if he had run a long race and had suffered defeat. "Then she told you——"

The wind rustled the dead leaves and blew the fragrance by her.

"She told me everything."

"Then you knew that as we drove home I begged of her to come to me, that I intended to give up everybody for her, friends, everybody, everything that mattered. And then you came down the stairs—and out on the pavement——" He turned his grey, distorted face towards her and looked at her as if she were partly responsible. "If you had not come then——"

She put her hand up to her throat: "I did not know."

There was someone here, her sister-in-law, and I did not want her to know Peter had been out driving in the car with anyone. She was the sort of person who would have misunderstood. She came to ask Peter to go back. I think Peter would have gone. When she came in she had to choose. Oh, Cecil, can't you see that it would never have done—that Eltrym, when she understood, would never have gone away with you? Do you think that I could have lived with her all these months and not have known the sort of girl she is? ”

“You thought you knew *me*, didn't you? ”

She lifted her head. Words rushed to her lips. “And I do. Oh, I do! You would not have done this thing, Cecil.”

“Wouldn't I? ”—and he laughed harshly. “Oh, I thought all that out last night. Do you know that I tramped the streets, that I went past these buildings seven times if I went once, that as I walked I hammered the whole thing out? ” He put up his hand to his head and lurched. “You will say I was mad, I suppose. Perhaps I was mad.”

He sat down on a chair by the door and hid his face in his hands. The clock ticked audibly in the stillness.

Presently he spoke to Catherine without looking up :

“You don't know what it is to feel like that, to suffer——”

He could not finish his sentence, but Catherine answered: “I think I do.”

He gazed at her with a gleam in his dull eyes. “Then you will understand, Cathie. I—I wanted to marry Peter. I loved her. I—I took her out yesterday to tell her so.”

A swift tear rolled down Catherine's cheek. “Yes, I guessed it.”

“And then—she told me. It was dreadful. I did not think I could suffer like that——” For a moment he lost grip of himself.

“I know—I know,” said Catherine, and she came and stood by him and put her hand on his shoulder. She stood looking down on him with a great wistfulness.

"But you wouldn't want to ruin her life if you loved her, Cecil. Don't you see that it would come to that? We know that such things do happen, as—as—people living together. We know that it happens even in our world, just as we know the price they have to pay. But it doesn't make things any different, Cecil, and Peter would never have been happy. Can't you see that, Cecil?"

"If she cared for me as I cared for her," he said deliberately, "nothing else would have mattered."

"But did she, did she? I don't want to hurt you, Cecil, but I think he was always, somehow, there at the back of her mind. Marriage seems to be like that; there is some tie more than mere words or living together will account for. I don't believe much in clerical blessings, as you know, but—there's a something, I don't know what it is, there is a something. I think sooner or later it would have been strong enough to call her back."

"I cannot see it," he said passionately, staring at her under his haggard brows.

"You cannot at present," she said gently. "It is all too soon for—for any of us to see quite clearly. But I think Eltrym was beginning to see. And she was not the kind of woman to be able to do wrong and be happy. I could see that last night. I think I have always seen it. She is too sensitive, for one thing, and for another there is the heavy weight of the Presbyterianism of her ancestors in the scale. It has got her in its grip with all its ideas of loyalty, of faith, of vows to be kept. We are not Scots, you and I, Cecil, and we cannot more than dimly comprehend it. But it is there, uncompromising, stern, of a tremendous power and force, capable of determining great issues, acting in the hour of crisis. It is the very essence, the very spirit of Scotland itself. I felt it last night in that thin body of hers as she leaned against me. It had helped her to a decision and she would not go back on it. If you had seen her——"

"I would to God I had!" he cried fiercely, and he got up and walked towards the window.

"If you had seen her then, or this morning, you

would have known it, Cecil. It was there in her face, her quiet face that looked so much older. And yet she was not unhappy—I think you would like to know that, Cecil. And she gave me the sense of one who no longer walked quite alone."

Cecil looked out of the window and his drawn face quivered ever so slightly. "Yes," he said, after a pause, "I am glad you told me that. I will try to remember that, to think of her like that, when there are—other pictures that threaten to drive me mad—when I think of her—my Peter—and that she has gone back to him."

And then he swung away from the window as if he could bear to stand there no more. His coat-sleeve caught the bowl of rose-leaves and knocked it over. It crashed to the floor, but he did not seem to hear or heed it.

"Good-bye, Cathie"—he spoke gruffly. "I don't know when I shall come again, or what I am going to do for a while. There is a pressure of work on hand and I have to meet it." He put his hand to his head. "You remember that book of Capel Boake's, Cathie, the book called 'Painted Clay,' wasn't it? Do you remember the lines in it, 'Gods of the desert of dreadful day, grant us the gift of a great forgetting'?" He held out his hand to her. "But if you will let me come sometimes—when there is no one else here—just to talk to you. You always understood, Cathie. You were always the very best pal a man could ever have—the best friend in the world—you'll still be that, won't you, Cathie?"

She gave him both her hands as he faced her with weary, hopeless resignation.

"Always and always, Cecil."

And then he went. Catherine heard his steps in the hall, the pause as he took his cap from the rack. The door opened and closed.

With her hands against her heart she waited until, far below, she heard the faint echo of his footsteps across the pavement and then the crunch of the car as it turned on the paved road.

Catherine's eyes went to the scattered rose-leaves on

the floor. The wind from the open window stirred their fragrance as she knelt to gather them together.

The bowl was broken, the pretty blue bowl she had scrimped and saved to buy.

"The bowl is broken," whispered Catherine, "but it can be mended. It will never be quite the same—but—it will mend."

And the rose-leaves, all that was left of last year's glory of palest pink and deepest red, were withered and dry. But the scent of them lingered.

Catherine lifted them in her hands, buried her face in them as if for one moment she would recapture their one-time fragrance and beauty. Perhaps the roses of a year to come bloomed before her for that spell of anguish when she shut her eyes.

"He has gone," she said to herself, "but he will come back. He will come back one day. It may be a long time, a long, long time. But he will come. He may be quite old and I may be all he has left in the world. And he may be weary and not care very much, perhaps, but just be grateful because I am there. But I don't care"—her voice broke a little then—"I don't care how long. He will come back."

And then she repeated, as if she heard again the question he had asked her that afternoon:

"Always and always."

CHAPTER XXXIV

HAME

. . . O, let me lave my soul at last
In the blue waters of Forgetfulness.

SEAFORTH MACKENZIE.

THE tram clanged by on its way, its yellow lights gleaming and flashing on the wet road.

Eltrym stood at the corner and looked after it.

The night was dark and there were no stars. The wind, chill and damp, blew by her. She shivered and held the warm furry body of the dog closer to her.

Her mind was bruised and aching dully. There had been so much thinking, so much trying not to think at all, so many thoughts opposed against each other. All the long journey from London that silent battle had gone on.

And now she stood apathetically and alone at the dark corner, clutching Joseph tightly, her suit-case at her feet, and looked after the tram. She had a vague sense of light and warmth and companionship lost.

People, quite strangers to her, in the train, had spoken to her. One of them, a stout, kindly woman with a broad accent, had asked her if she were ill. A big red-haired Highlander had obligingly offered her his flask. She had shaken her head. Someone had been very kind to Joseph, had fed him with biscuits, had handed first him and then the suit-case out to her.

As she came across the road she had seen her face reflected in the tall mirror that advertised somebody's whisky outside one of the public-houses. It was white and drawn, like the face of a stranger.

And here she was still at the dark corner as if her feet refused to take her farther.

But her mind moved apathetically. She had put the case down because she must rest. There had been no one to meet her at the station. She had not expected it. She had gone away of her own free will. She must come back of her own free will. When she knocked at the door it would be opened, not before. And when she entered and it closed behind her, no mention would be made that she had ever gone. That was the Scottish way.

Christina had left money for her fare. She had found it after she had gone, the exact amount needed, even to the tram-car fares. There had been no allowance for such luxuries as taxis, because Christina never thought of such a thing, especially when there were trams almost to the door.

In any case, the suit-case was not heavy. It had only seemed so when she came to the corner of the street beyond which the lights of one other familiar street showed.

She had only to go down this street and into the next, and the rows of neat precise houses, of slate roofs and narrow square chimneys, of prim windows with starched curtains and pots of aspidistras would confront her.

She would go past them one by one until she came to the very last house of all with its adjoining patch of land, its side-path and its extra upper window to give it an air of distinction and of aloofness from its neighbours.

And when she knocked Christina would come to the door and open it without any sign of emotion whatever, or reference to the past. And inside the kitchen where at this hour—for the train had been late—her father-in-law would be taking off his boots and exposing his grey worsted stockinged feet, he would lift his head and greet her with an air of chastened warmth, and of resignation to the Lord's will :

“Oh, it's you, dochter !”

The two candles would soon be burning on the table, and no doubt the Scripture reading would be longer and more impressive than usual. There would perhaps be a special prayer befitting the occasion.

Everything would be the same, almost, as when she last went down that street.

Two things, of course, would be changed. For one, the old, old man would be no longer in his dark corner by the fireplace. Somehow she could not picture the kitchen without him. Queerly enough, she felt sorry that he would not be there. For all his raving, his harsh chatter, his bursts of loud, vacant laughter, there had been times when his bright monkey-like eyes had turned to her, and reason gleamed in their dark depths. He had nodded and muttered into his beard and smiled at her as if he said :

"I know. I know. *We* know."

And then—she could not put it away from her mind any longer—there was Sandy and the meeting with Sandy.

She looked about her in a hunted way. She leaned against the dark wall behind her, forgetful of any who might pass by. Joseph stirred and whimpered in her arms. The lights of the street beyond flickered and wavered.

At this hour all the crowd, the happy, merry, laughing crowd, would be swarming in and out of each other's rooms, knocking here, calling impetuously there, conning the events of the day, pausing at the window, some of them, to look at the stars and the slim crescent moon shining over the old Thames.

The night was dark here and there were no stars. The clouds hid the moon. Under the swaying circles of light the pavement showed dark and damp; and a gust of wind blew coldly round the corner and Joseph whimpered.

She laid her cold face against his warm, dark head. She whispered: "Just a little while, Joseph—a little while——"

How the yellow lamps of London would be blowing,

like crocuses under glass, in this changing wind! The dark trees in the square opposite Catherine's rooms would be tossing their tall heads and trumpeting defiance. Now Chelsea Bridge would be shining out, outlined like a fairy network silhouetted against the night, its spires and towers and the fine curves of its arches reflected in rippling light and shadow in the water below.

She closed her eyes and saw the stars, thousands of stars, thousands of gleaming worlds, all moving on in their appointed destined course, just as oneself moved on.

And beyond the bridge, over whose side she had often leaned at this hour and looked down at the water, there would be the myriad lights of London, tiers on tiers of them rising into the glowing haze, half purple, half gold, that rimmed the horizon wherever one looked. And as one crossed the bridge one found unexpectedly a cobbled lane, shadowed by tall houses and high dark buildings, a crooked, cobbled lane with tiny houses and shops with gabled roofs, and in one an old white-haired man who sold books and questionable antiques and cheap furniture, and who was to be found, spectacles on nose, head bent and dim eyes peering, always reading. It was all part of what she had left—as was even Mrs. McFadyen, round, fat, and red-cheeked, with arms akimbo, as she dilated on her relatives and their ways and woes.

She clung desperately to all these things that were fast receding from her. They were almost gone. Dimly she heard the echo of merry laughter, the click of Sadie's absurd heels, her lovable impudent face turned for one last look, as on the station platform that morning. And Sadie, Sadie the laughter-loving, the happiness-seeking, had suddenly burst into tears and run away—there had been no acting about it that time.

Then memory should always hold a warm corner for John Gordon, dear John Montgomery Gordon, debonaire, cheerful, twinkling-eyed to the last, standing by Catherine, who was so pale, only her scarlet mouth a

patch of colour against the whiteness of her face. Catherine and she had clung to each other wordlessly—and then the guard had called out something and the train moved off.

Catherine would have gone back home, and perhaps in the quiet afternoon, if not before, Cecil would come in. He would come in as of old, but he would see in days to come, if not now, what she, Eltrym, had glimpsed yesterday, the depth and purity of Catherine's love.

For a moment there in the dark street, Cecil's face bent above her, his boyish face, his clear, loving eyes—for a moment, one poignant moment, she held the door of memory wide. For a moment she leaned her cold cheek against his. And then she whispered good-bye to all that had been and that might ever be. She turned back, from the green beckoning lanes of wandering, to the road of destiny. There came back to her words from a poem Ethel Quinn had written, of the lure of roads, the side-roads and the green lanes :

The Road

Goes on in destined straightness. It is we
Who stray, unheeding or rebellious, into lanes
Green with some transient Spring and gay with flowers,
Where Life's sun-dial counts but happy hours;
Some climb the hills of Fame, some wind to a far sea.
. . . . All are as alleys blind.
And call it God or call it Destiny,
And laugh or cry or pray for things that's gone,
Past all your laughter or your tears,
Past the last milestone of the years
The Road goes on—and on.

The road went on. Where it was linked by that of another, Eltrym was not the only woman who had found it hard at times. She was not the only woman who had rebelled against its confines. She must only be glad she had come back before it was too late.

She saw again the battle-scarred flag, emblem of duty and courage superb in the grey Cathedral. She

cried aloud, "Oh, give me courage! Give me faith! Give me strength to go on and endure until the end!"

The wind came by with a mighty rushing as of wings. It beat past her and around her and swirled her cloak about her. She opened her eyes to the lonely street, to the knowledge that the storm was upon her. The rain blew in her face and spattered on the pavement and on the wall behind her.

She stooped and picked up the suit-case as the wind whirled with all its stormy force against her. She struggled on, turned the corner, and into the quieter street.

As if unheeding, she tottered past the silent houses—their blinds drawn, their doors fast shut—along the wet pavement, with the rain on her face, to the last house of all, where a light showed in the upper window.

The window itself was open a little. The echo of her footsteps would ring up from the quiet street.

Sandy, poor Sandy, would be lying watching those hideous green rep curtains, lying there ill and helpless, desperately sorry. She put up her hands numbly, and did not know whether it was tears or rain on her face.

She had opened the gate and for a moment leaned against it. Sandy was up there, and soon she must go to him. He would not turn. He would wait for her to speak. And at last he would say in a strangled voice:

"It is all right now, my puir lassie. It is all right now. We will begin again."

The wind skirled and shrieked by her and flung her against the gate. It was only a few steps to the door, a few steps, and yet her feet would not, could not, move. And all at once it was as if the wind ceased and one walked by her and helped her. Jeanie's whispering voice came through the years:

"The bend of the road—just round the bend of the road——"

She lifted the knocker and heard it give tongue throughout the silent house. She knew that Jeanie stood beside her, invisible, but real.

The door opened and Christina stood there, and—doubtless lest the neighbours might talk—the passage was dark behind her. The light of a street-lamp fell on her sister-in-law and she uttered a sigh of relief. Kirstie's eyes noted the dog, and for an imperceptible second she hesitated in disapproval. Then she stepped aside and held the door wide open.

They went in, she and Jeanie, together. Christina saw only Eltrym.

"Ay! So ye're back," said Christina.

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